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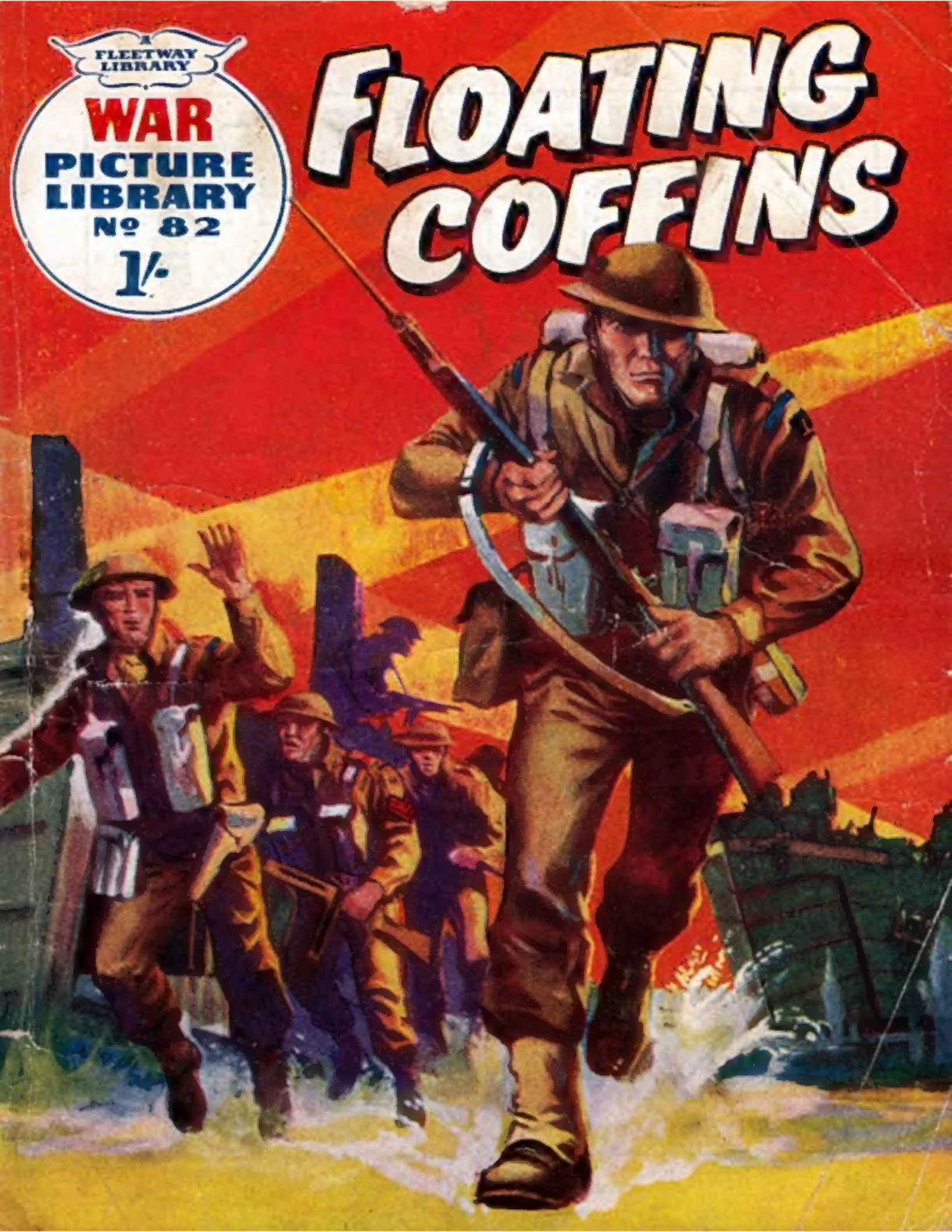
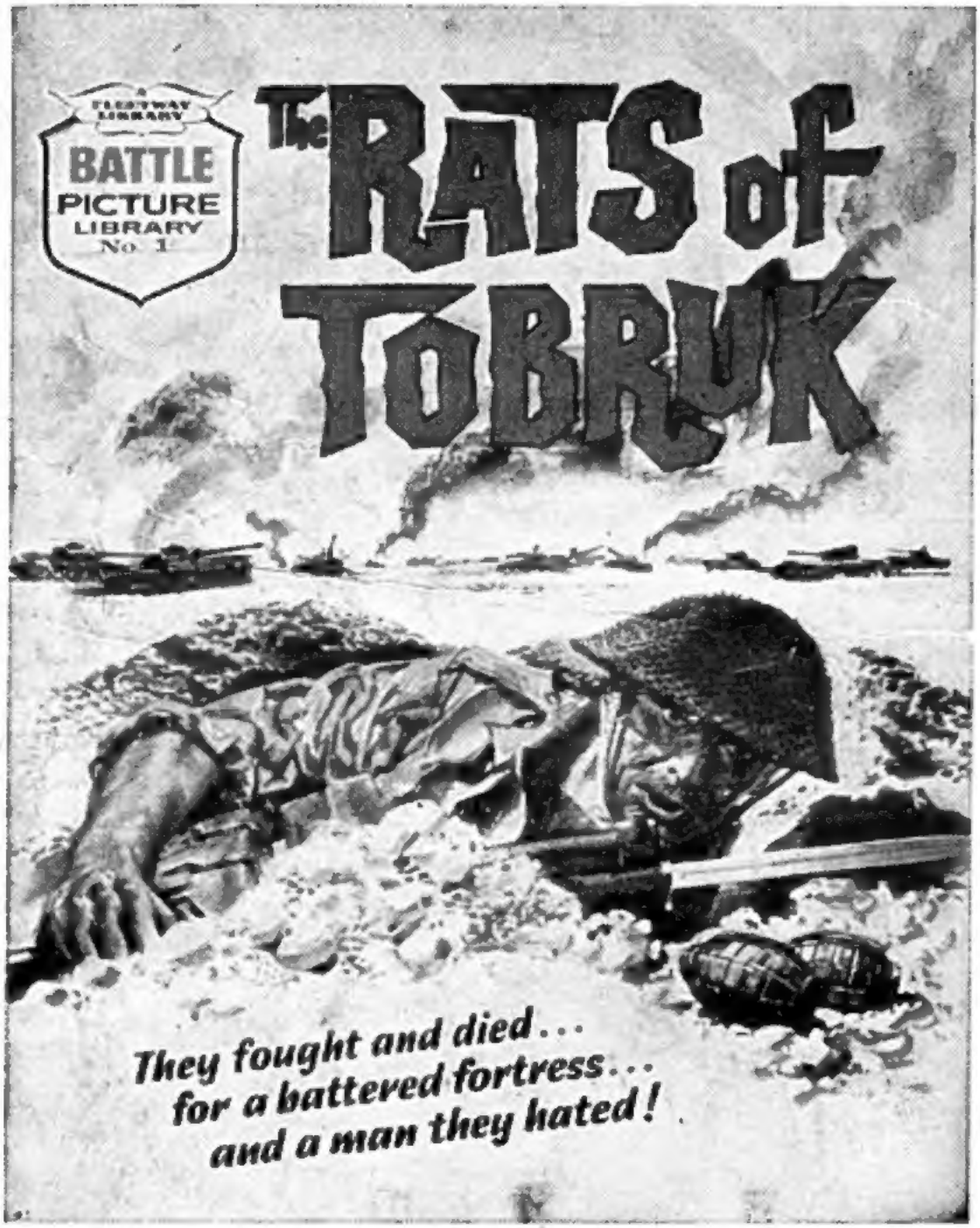
FLOATING COFFINS



IT'S NEW... IT'S TERRIFIC!

BATTLE PICTURE LIBRARY

Issues Numbers 1 & 2 On Sale: MONDAY 16th. JANUARY



TWO Dramatic, All-action Issues Every Month

MANY STRANGE VESSELS OF WAR WERE THROWN UP ON THE FLOODTIDE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. MERCHANT CRUISERS, ESCORT CARRIERS, ASSAULT LANDING SHIPS... AND PERHAPS THE MOST UNSEAMANLY OF ALL, A WILD VARIETY OF LANDING CRAFT, GRIMLY NICKNAMED BY THOSE WHO SAILED IN THEM...

FLOATING COFFINS

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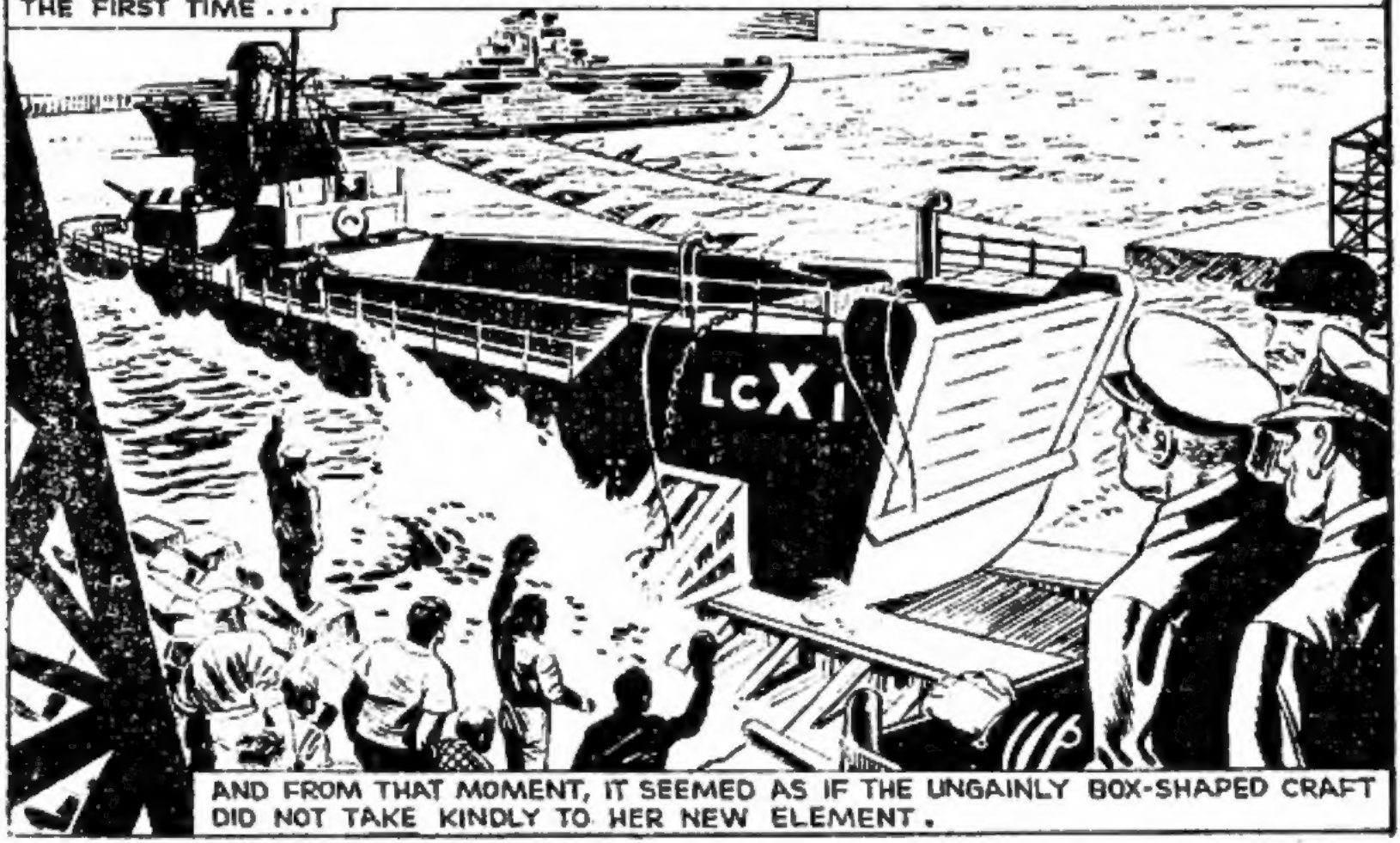
Chapter 1. UGLY DUCKLING

ONLY A HANDFUL OF DOCK WORKERS, A COUPLE OF DISINTERESTED ROYAL NAVAL OFFICERS AND A SHIPYARD OVERSEER WERE PRESENT WHEN L.C.X.1 TOOK TO THE WATER FOR THE FIRST TIME . . .



AND FROM THAT MOMENT, IT SEEMED AS IF THE UNGAINLY BOX-SHAPED CRAFT DID NOT TAKE KINDLY TO HER NEW ELEMENT.

SHE BROKE FREE OF HER MOORING LINES AND A COLLISION WITH A NEARBY DESTROYER WAS NARROWLY AVERTED. LATER, WALLOWING UP THE CLYDE IN THE HANDS OF SHIPYARD EXPERTS, L.C.X.1 CREATED A MOST UNFAVOURABLE IMPRESSION ON THE NAVAL COMMANDER ABOARD FOR THE TRIALS.

AFTER SEVERAL HOURS OF THE GRUELLING MOTION, THE COMMANDER – WHO WAS BEGINNING TO REGRET THE LARGE LUNCH HE HAD EATEN – BROKE A LONG SILENCE.

THIS... THIS CRAFT PITCHES WORSE THAN A CANOE IN A HIGH SEA. WHAT ON EARTH'S WRONG WITH HER?

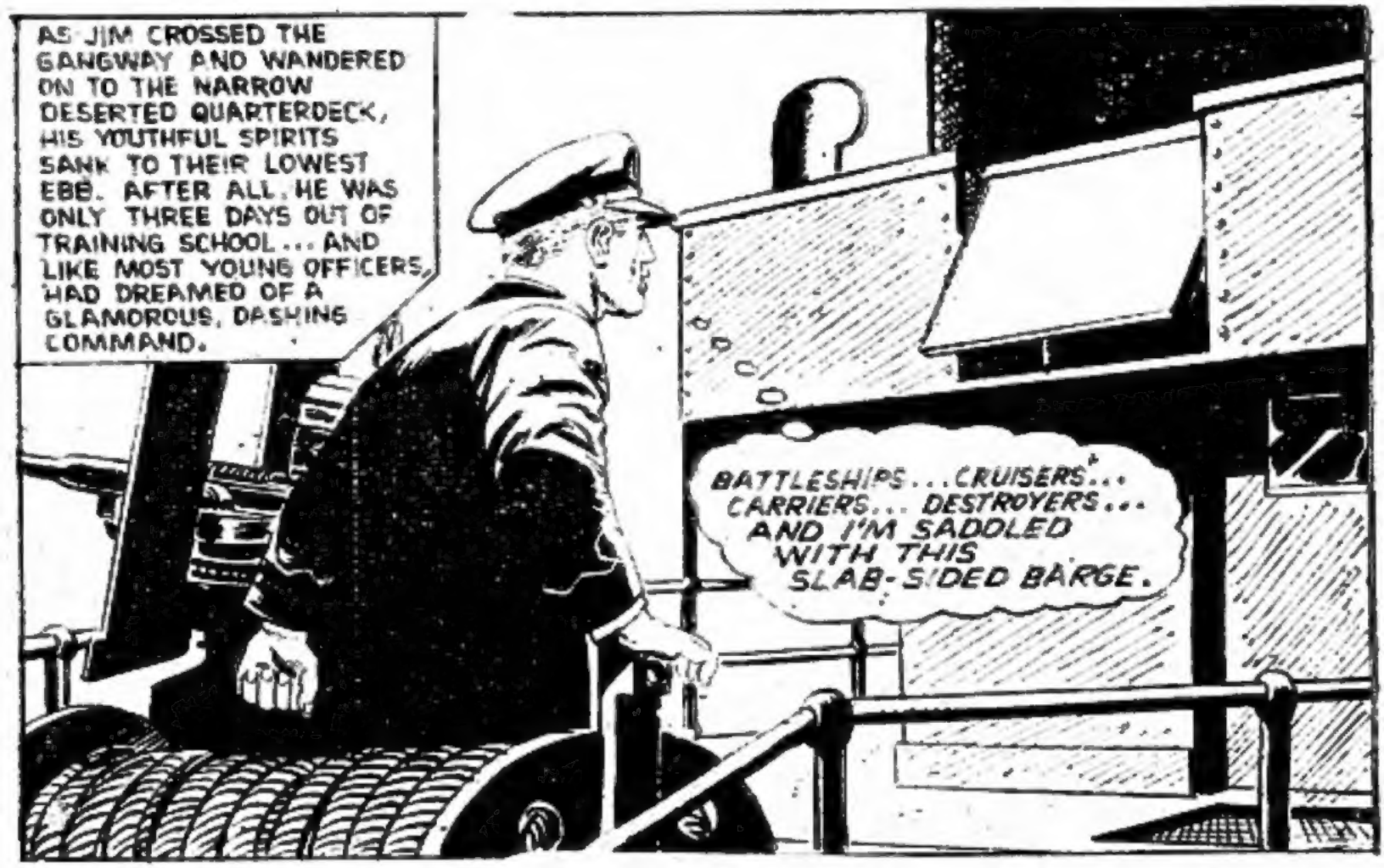
SHE'S BOUND TO ROLL A BIT WHEN THE WELL-DECK'S EMPTY, COMMANDER. BUT YOU'LL FIND SHE'LL PUT UP A GOOD PERFORMANCE IN HEAVIER SEAS THAN THIS... MUCH BETTER THAN THE SMALLER ASSAULT CRAFT!

THE COMMANDER LISTENED TO THE SHIPYARD EXPERT'S GLIB ARGUMENTS WITH MISGIVING, BUT FINALLY, RATHER RELUCTANTLY SIGNED FOR THE LANDING CRAFT ON BEHALF OF THE ROYAL NAVY.

NONE OF THESE LANDING CRAFT ARE EXACTLY IDEAL SEA-GOING VESSELS BUT THAT'S ONE PROTOTYPE I CAN'T RECOMMEND. IT'S NOT A WARSHIP AT ALL... MORE LIKE A DASHED WINKLE BARGE!

THAT EVENING, THE COMMANDER REPORTED TO THE FLAG OFFICER, SOUTH-WEST SCOTLAND COMMAND, STATING FRANKLY HIS MISGIVINGS ABOUT L.C.X.I. BUT THE HARASSED REAR ADMIRAL WAS SCARCELY IN A MOOD TO LISTEN.
NEVER MIND ABOUT BAD DESIGN NOW, I WANT THAT BOAT OPERATIONAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'VE GOT COMBINED OPERATIONS H.Q. BREATHING DOWN MY NECK. THEY WANT EVERY L.C. I CAN LET THEM HAVE FOR AN IMMINENT OPERATION...
VERY WELL, SIR. I'LL SPEED THINGS UP AS MUCH AS I CAN. BUT I PITY THE POOR BLIGHTER WHO'S GIVEN COMMAND OF HER!
PAH! DO ONE OF THESE YOUNG PUPPIES GOOD. MOST OF 'EM SEEM TO CONSIDER ANYTHING LESS THAN A DESTROYER BENEATH THEIR DIGNITY! WHEN I WAS A JUNIOR OFFICER...

THE UNLUCKY OFFICER WAS SUB-LIEUTENANT JIM PAGE, R.N.V.R.
GOOD GRIEF! SHE'S CERTAINLY NO OIL-PAINTING...
LCX


AS JIM CROSSED THE GANGWAY AND WANDERED ON TO THE NARROW DESERTED QUARTERDECK, HIS YOUTHFUL SPIRITS SANK TO THEIR LOWEST EBB. AFTER ALL, HE WAS ONLY THREE DAYS OUT OF TRAINING SCHOOL... AND LIKE MOST YOUNG OFFICERS, HAD DREAMED OF A GLAMOROUS, DASHING COMMAND.
BATTLESHIPS... CRUISERS... CARRIERS... DESTROYERS... AND I'M SADDLED WITH THIS SLAB-SIDED BARGE.

NEXT DAY, JIM MET THE MEN WHO WERE TO SERVE UNDER HIM. THE FIRST ARRIVAL WAS PETTY OFFICER TOM HARRIS, THE COXSWAIN ...
... MY LAST FIFTEEN YEARS IN DESTROYERS, SIR.
DESTROYERS, EH? I ONLY HOPE YOU WON'T BE TOO DISAPPOINTED, PETTY OFFICER. PERHAPS WE'D BETTER GO STRAIGHT DOWN TO THE DOCKS AND HAVE A LOOK AT HER.

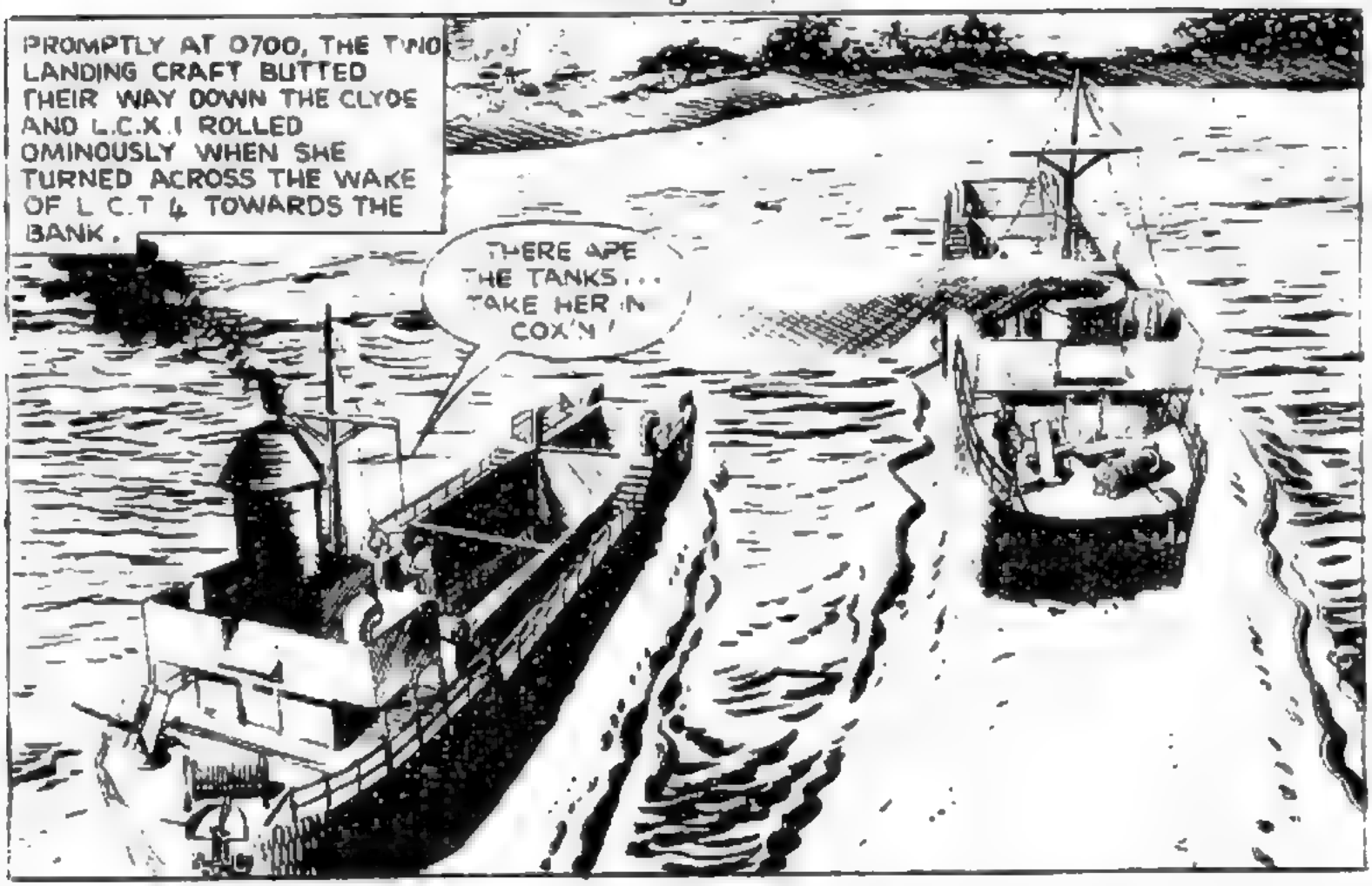
VETERAN PETTY OFFICER HARRIS WAS STILL RECOVERING FROM THIS FIRST SIGHT OF THE UNGAINLY LOOKING LANDING CRAFT WHEN THE REST OF THE SMALL COMPLEMENT BEGAN TO ARRIVE.
EXCUSE ME, SIR. IS *THIS* L.C.X. ONE?

NOR WAS ABLE SEAMAN 'RUSTY' O'BRIEN FRESH FROM THREE YEARS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AS AN OERLIKON GUNNER ABOARD A HEAVY CRUISER, IMPRESSED BY HIS NEW BERTH.
COR! I MUST HAVE SOME LOUSY STUFF DOWN ON MY PAPERS TO HAVE DESERVED THIS!

TWO DAYS LATER, THE WHOLE OF L.C.X.I'S CREW HAD ARRIVED AND SETTLED IN. THEY WERE READY FOR DUTY, AND JIM WAS EXPECTING SAILING ORDERS THAT SAME AFTERNOON...
I KNOW THIS CRAFT IS A BIT OF A SHAKER... BUT YOU'VE ALL HAD YEARS OF VALUABLE EXPERIENCE, AND I KNOW YOU'LL GIVE OF YOUR BEST IN THE TOUGH MONTHS WHICH LIE AHEAD OF US. THE BEST OF LUCK TO YOU ALL...
WE'LL NEED IT, TOO!

LATER, JIM WAS CALLED TO THE DOCKYARD COMMANDER'S OFFICE AND INTRODUCED TO CAPTAIN BARTON OF COMBINED OPERATIONS. THEY WERE TO PROCEED ON AN EXERCISE...
... PICK UP TWO TANKS AT POINT 'A', TRANSPORT THEM TO POINT 'B', PUT THEM ASHORE. L.C.T. FOUR WILL TAKE THEM OFF AGAIN AND RETURN THEM TO POINT 'A'. IS THAT UNDERSTOOD, PAGE?
YES, SIR — THAT'S QUITE CLEAR!

AFTER BRIEFING HIS OWN CREW, JIM WENT ALONG THE DOCKS TO MEET LIEUTENANT MATT COLLINS, R.N.R., SKIPPER OF L.C.T. 4. COLLINS HAD ALREADY SAILED IN LANDING CRAFT...
... AND ANOTHER THING. DON'T FORGET TO DROP YOUR STERN ANCHOR FIFTY YARDS OFF SHORE, IN CASE YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY IN GETTING OFF.
THANKS A LOT, MATT. YOU KNOW, I'M QUITE LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS FIRST JAUNT.


PROMPTLY AT 0700, THE TWO LANDING CRAFT BUTTED THEIR WAY DOWN THE CLYDE AND L.C.X.1 ROLLED OMINOUSLY WHEN SHE TURNED ACROSS THE WAKE OF L.C.T 4 TOWARDS THE BANK.
THERE ARE THE TANKS... TAKE HER IN COX'N!

WHILE MATT COLLINS STOOD HIS CRAFT OFF A FEW YARDS FROM THE BANK JIM MANOEUVRED INSHORE WITHOUT A HITCH... AND THE HEAVY RAMP CRASHED DOWN.
ALL RIGHT TO COME ABOARD NOW, SIR!
CARRY ON SERGEANT

THERE WAS JUST ROOM IN THE WELL DECK TO TAKE THE TWO TANKS, ONE BEHIND THE OTHER. THE TIDE WAS STILL FLOWING AND THE CRAFT SLIPPED OFF AGAIN WITHOUT DIFFICULTY.
SO FAR, SO GOOD, SKIPPER!
PROPER LITTLE UGLY DUCKLING, ISN'T SHE?
THAT ISN'T A BAD NAME FOR HER, COME TO THINK OF IT.
JIM FOUND POINT 'B' WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. CAPTAIN BARTON WENT ASHORE WITH THE FIRST TANK AND STOOD BY TO SEE THE SECOND ONE COME OFF. SUDDENLY, AS IT WAS RUMBLING DOWN THE STEEL RAMP, THE LANDING CRAFT SHIFTED, THE TANK WAS JERKED ASKEW AND THE CATERPILLAR TRACK BECAME ENTANGLED WITH THE CHAINS OF THE RAMP.
HOW DEEP IS IT FOR'ARD, O'BRIEN?
ONLY A FOOT, SIR – NO MORE! BUT THE TANK SEEMS TO BE JAMMED!
HOLD IT! HOLD IT! WHAT ON EARTH IS THE SKIPPER UP TO?

TEN EXASPERATING MINUTES DRAGGED BY WHILE THE SWEATING TANK COMMANDER TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO FREE HIS VEHICLE. CAPTAIN BARTON BEGAN TO PACE THE SHORE ANGRILY, WHILE JIM PAGE WRACKED HIS BRAINS FOR IDEAS. MATT COLLINS EDGED L.C.T. 4 CLOSER ...

NEXT TIME HE TRIES, JIM, GO ASTERN ON BOTH ENGINES — AND HAUL IN YOUR STERN ANCHOR.

IF THIS WAS A REAL OPERATION, WE'D HAVE BEEN CUT TO PIECES BY NOW.

LCX1

RIGHT, MATT! I'LL TRY ANYTHING ONCE.

TO THE MUFFLED BEAT OF HER ENGINES, L.C.X.1 JERKED ASTERN, THE TANK TORE ITSELF FREE AND PLOUGHED ASHORE THROUGH THE SHALLOWS.

THANK GOODNESS THAT HORRIBLE FIASCO IS OVER!

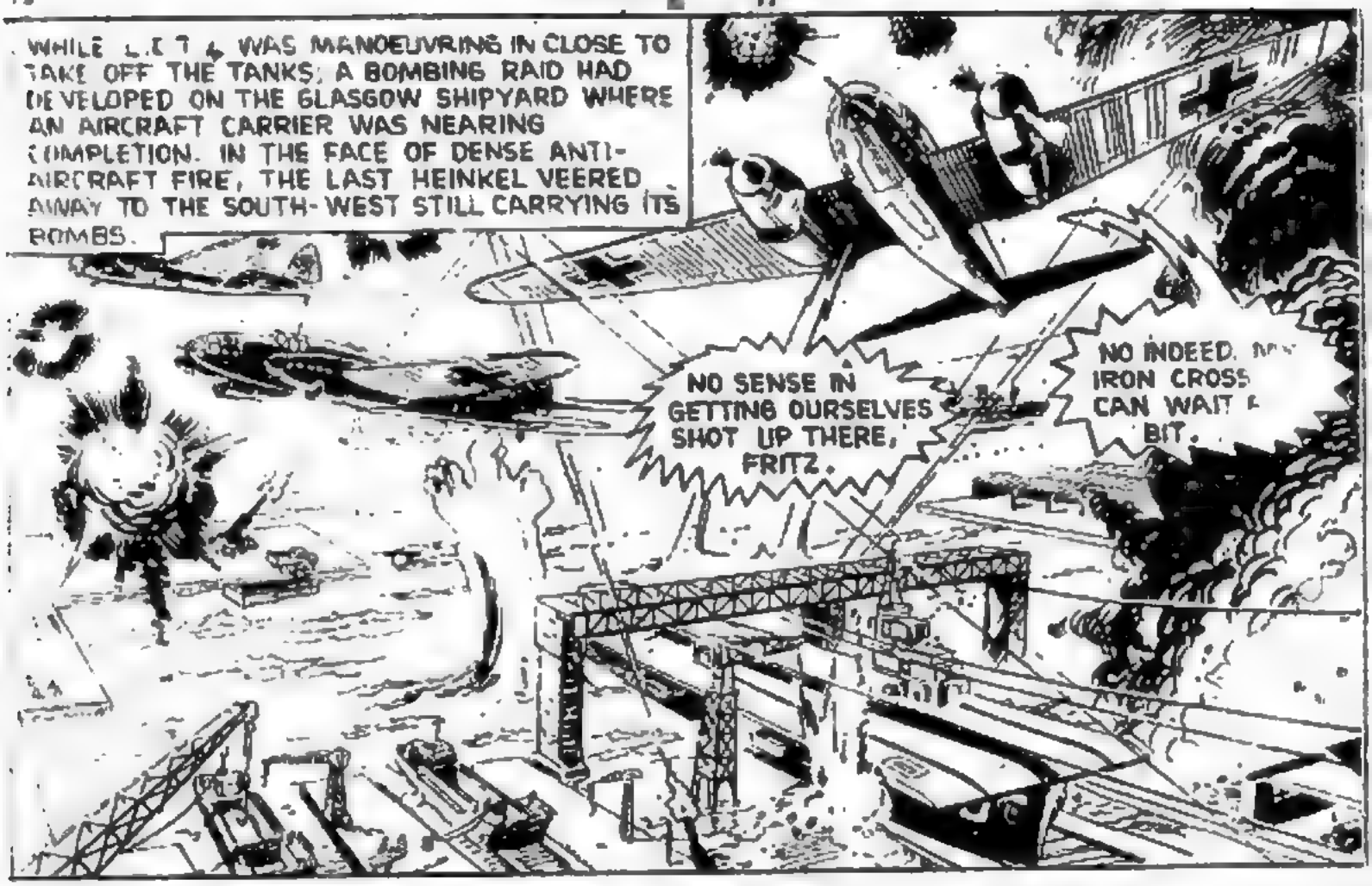
IF THE OTHER CRAFT ISN'T MORE EFFICIENT I CAN SEE US BEING MAROONED HERE FOR THE DURATION.

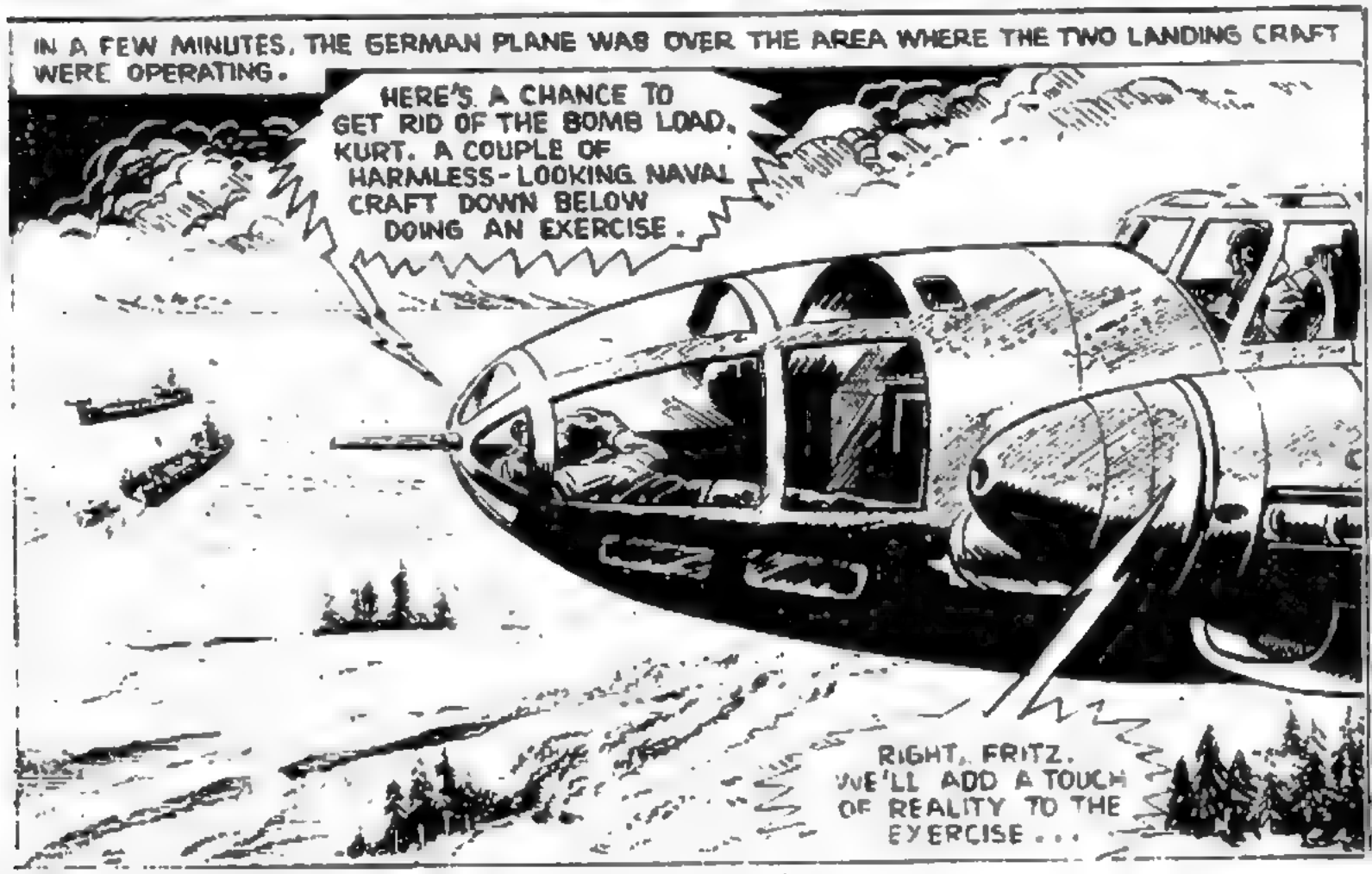
LCX1

IT'S TIMES LIKE THIS, COX'N, WHEN I WISH THE SEA WOULD OPEN UP AND SWALLOW US.

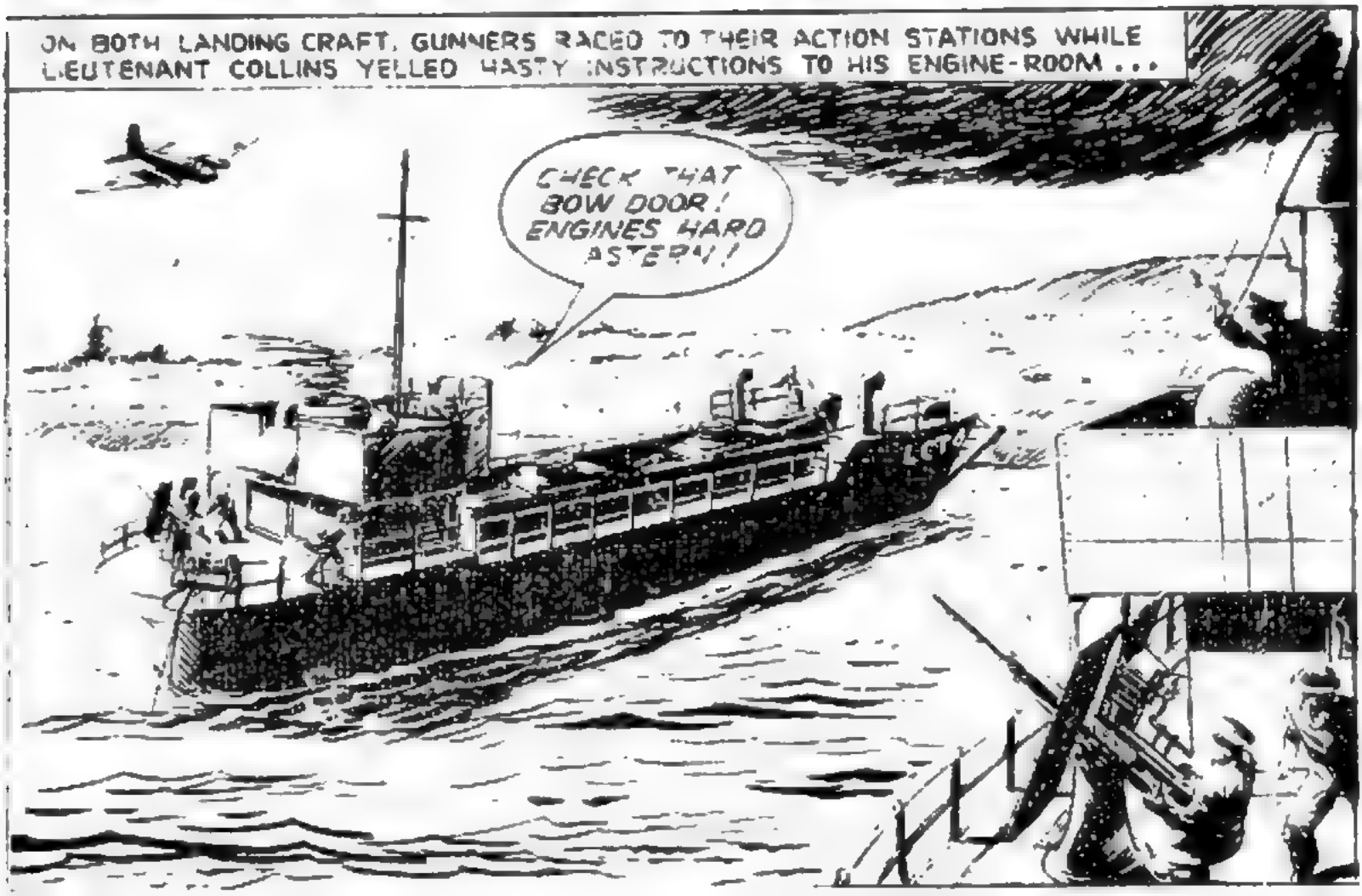
DON'T TAKE IT TO HEART, SIR... SHE'S AN UNWIELDY TUB TO HANDLE...

Floating Coffins





IT WAS THE ALERT RUSTY WHO SAW THE BOMBER CHANGE COURSE IN THEIR DIRECTION.
HMS
ENEMY BOMBER ON THE PORT BEAM! COMING IN FAST!

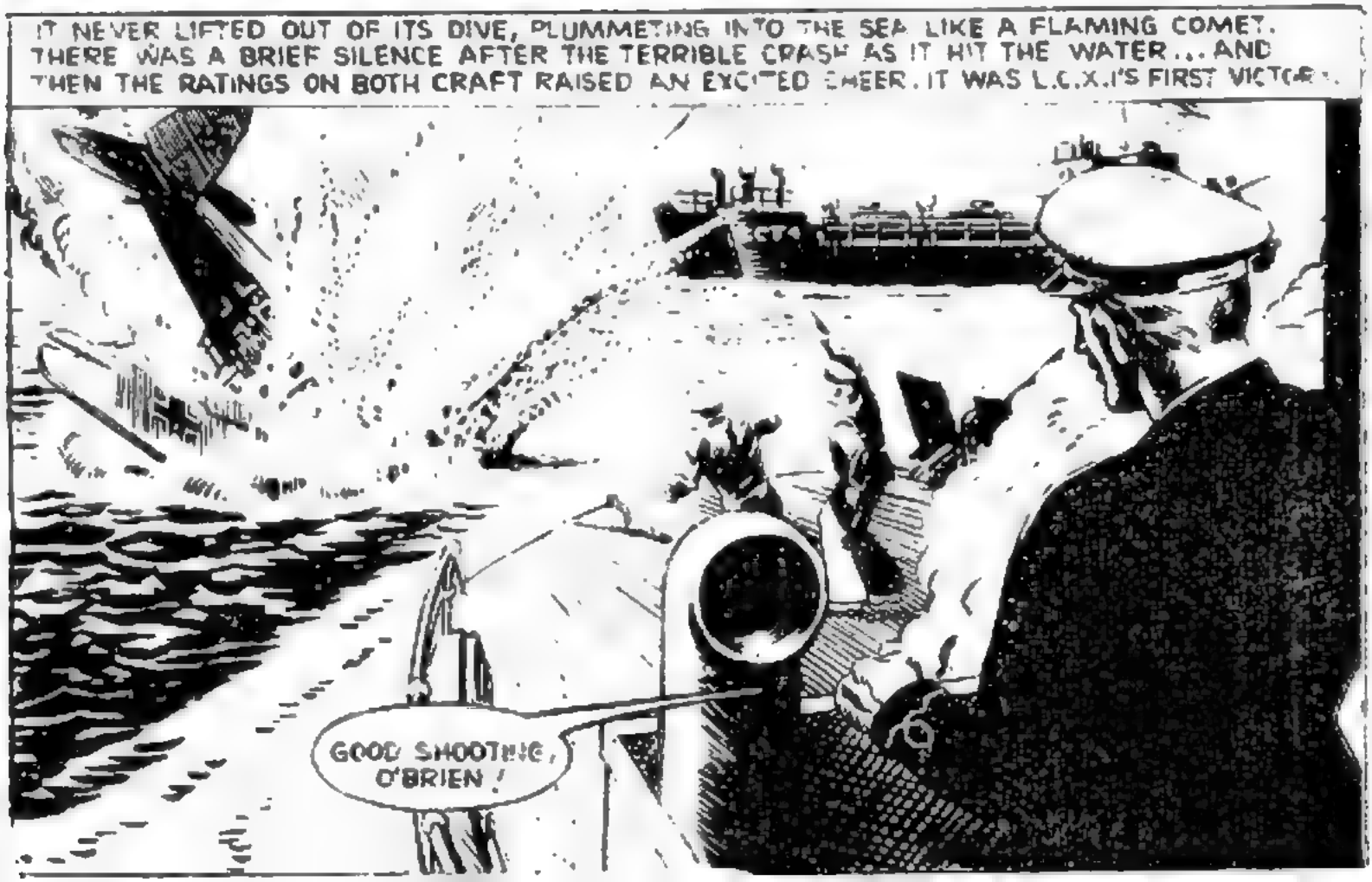

ON BOTH LANDING CRAFT, GUNNERS RACED TO THEIR ACTION STATIONS WHILE LIEUTENANT COLLINS YELLED HASTY INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS ENGINE-ROOM ...
CHECK THAT BOW DOOR! ENGINES HARD ASTERN!
LCT

THE OERLIKON ON L.C.X.I WAS THE FIRST TO BURST INTO VIOLENT LIFE. A STREAM OF SHELLS ERUPTED FROM THE LEAN MUZZLE OF RUSTY'S WEAPON, REACHING OUT TOWARDS THE ENEMY.
HE'S DROPPING HIS LOAD...
SUFFERIN' SNAKES! THOSE EGGS HAVE GOT OUR NAME ON 'EM!

THE BOMBS HIT THE SEA BETWEEN THE TWO LANDING CRAFT AND A GREAT FOUNTAIN OF SEETHING WATER TOWERED HIGHER THAN THE L.C.X.I'S SUPERSTRUCTURE. INSTINCTIVELY, THE CREW DIVED FOR COVER...
LCT
LUMME! THAT WAS CLOSE!

WHILE THE TWO STARTLED CREWS WERE GETTING THEIR BREATH BACK, JIM PAGE WAS SCANNING THE SKY. HIS CAUTION WAS REWARDED WHEN HE SPOTTED ANOTHER PLANE DIVING DOWN AT THEM OUT OF THE SUN.
MAN THOSE GUNS! HERE COMES ANOTHER...
THE PILOT OF THIS SECOND BOMBER WAS MORE DETERMINED THAN THE FIRST. HE HAD DROPPED HIS BOMBS OVER THE TARGET AREA AND HAD CIRCLED AWAY IN TIME TO SEE THE OTHER HEINKEL'S LOAD MISS THE LANDING CRAFT...
STAND BY, GUNNERS, TO STRAFE THE ENGLANDERS!
IN A LONG, LOW DIVE, THE HE-111 ROARED TOWARDS L.C.X.I, ITS CANNON SPITTING FLAME AND LEAD.
ONE OF US IS FOR IT, MATE... HIM OR US!
YOU'LL NEVER GET A BETTER CHANCE THAN THIS, ME OLD CHINA!

THE LINE OF THE OERLIKON'S SHELLS SLASHED ACROSS THE ONCOMING PLANE, OBLITERATING THE COCKPIT POSITION . . .


IT NEVER LIFTED OUT OF ITS DIVE, PLUMMETING INTO THE SEA LIKE A FLAMING COMET. THERE WAS A BRIEF SILENCE AFTER THE TERRIBLE CRASH AS IT HIT THE WATER . . . AND THEN THE RATINGS ON BOTH CRAFT RAISED AN EXCITED CHEER. IT WAS L.C.X.I'S FIRST VICTORY.
GOOD SHOOTING, O'BRIEN!

WHILST THEIR SISTER SHIP RETURNED THE TWO TANKS TO POINT 'A', RUSTY O'BRIEN CAME UP FROM BELOW WITH A CAN OF BLACK PAINT.
THAT'S THE START OF OUR TALLY, SIR!
HM, LOOKS A BIT LONELY ALL ON ITS OWN O'BRIEN.
IT WON'T BE FOR LONG, SIR!

THE FOLLOWING DAY, JIM WAS SUMMONED TO THE DOCKYARD COMMANDER'S OFFICE TO RECEIVE FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. HE OFFERED HIS OPINION ON HIS SHIP'S PERFORMANCE.
... AND IN MY OPINION, SIR SHE'S BADLY DESIGNED SHE'S SLUGGISH ON HER HELM AND VIBRATES A LOT AT TEN KNOTS. SHE COULD BE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE SENIOR SERVICE IN WORK CONNECTED WITH THE ARMY.
DO YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW? I HAD THE REPORT ON THE TRIALS, PAGE. YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF A BAD JOB.

THE YOUNG OFFICER RETURNED TO HIS SHIP, FEELING ANYTHING BUT CONFIDENT AFTER THE INTERVIEW.
WELL, LADS, I DIDN'T GET MUCH CHANGE OUT OF THE COMMANDER. WE'RE BOUND FOR SCAPA TONIGHT.
THEY AREN'T WASTING ANY TIME SHOVING US OUT, THEN, SIR.
ONE RUN ASHORE THEN OUT TO THE BACK OF BLOOMING BEYOND...

NEARLY TWO DAYS LATER, L.C.X.1 WAS WALLOWING TOWARDS THE GREAT HOME FLEET ANCHORAGE OF SCAPA FLOW. IN COMPANY WITH HER WERE FIVE MORE LANDING CRAFT INCLUDING L.C.T.4... THEY CONSTITUTED Nº 3 FLOTILLA.
SURE, THAT'S SCAPA. ONCE SEEN NEVER FORGOTTEN.
BETTER GO BELOW AND TIDY YOURSELVES UP, MEN. WE'LL BE RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH THE BIG SHIP NAVY SOON.
SO LONG AS THEY DON'T KEEP US SWINGING ROUND THE BUOY TOO LONG.

Chapter 2. COMBINED OPERATIONS

THE FLOTILLA OFFICER INTRODUCED HIMSELF, AND A FEW MINUTES. LATER THE MOTOR-BOAT DEPOSITED THE LANDING CRAFT OFFICERS AT THE FLAGSHIP'S AFTER GANGWAY.
THIS CERTAINLY LOOKS LIKE THE REAL THING!

A MESSENGER STEPPED FORWARD IMMEDIATELY AND CONDUCTED THEM TO THE ADMIRAL'S QUARTERS RIGHT AFT. MANY SHIPS' COMMANDERS AND SENIOR ARMY OFFICERS HAD PRECEDED THEM.
IS THAT EVERYBODY? YOU MAY SMOKE, GENTLEMEN...
RN
RN
RN

THE ADMIRAL ROSE AND IN TERSE PHRASES OUTLINED THE PROJECTED COMBINED OPERATIONS RAID ON STORD, IN NORWAY. COMMANDOS WERE TO SABOTAGE A RADAR STATION, FROGMEN WERE TO MINE SHIPS IN THE FIORD, AND LANDING CRAFT HAD THE JOB OF BRINGING OFF 150 LOYAL NORWEGIANS.

... DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE SENT TO YOUR SHIPS, GENTLEMEN. BUT I'VE BROUGHT YOU TOGETHER SO THAT THE ARMY AND THE NAVY CAN GET USED TO RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH EACH OTHER. THE TWO SERVICES WILL BE ENTIRELY DEPENDENT UPON EACH OTHER AND UPON YOUR CO-OPERATION WILL DEPEND THE SUCCESS OF THIS OPERATION.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE EXCITED LANDING CRAFT OFFICERS WERE BEING WHISKED BACK TO THEIR SHIPS IN THE MOTOR-BOAT.

SO WE'RE TO GO IN TO THE BEACH AND BRING OFF THE NORWEGIANS.

I'M AFRAID NOT, PAGE. OUR FLOTILLA IS TO TAKE OFF RESERVE TROOPS FROM ONE OF THE CARRIERS AND MERELY STAND BY IN CASE THEY'RE WANTED...

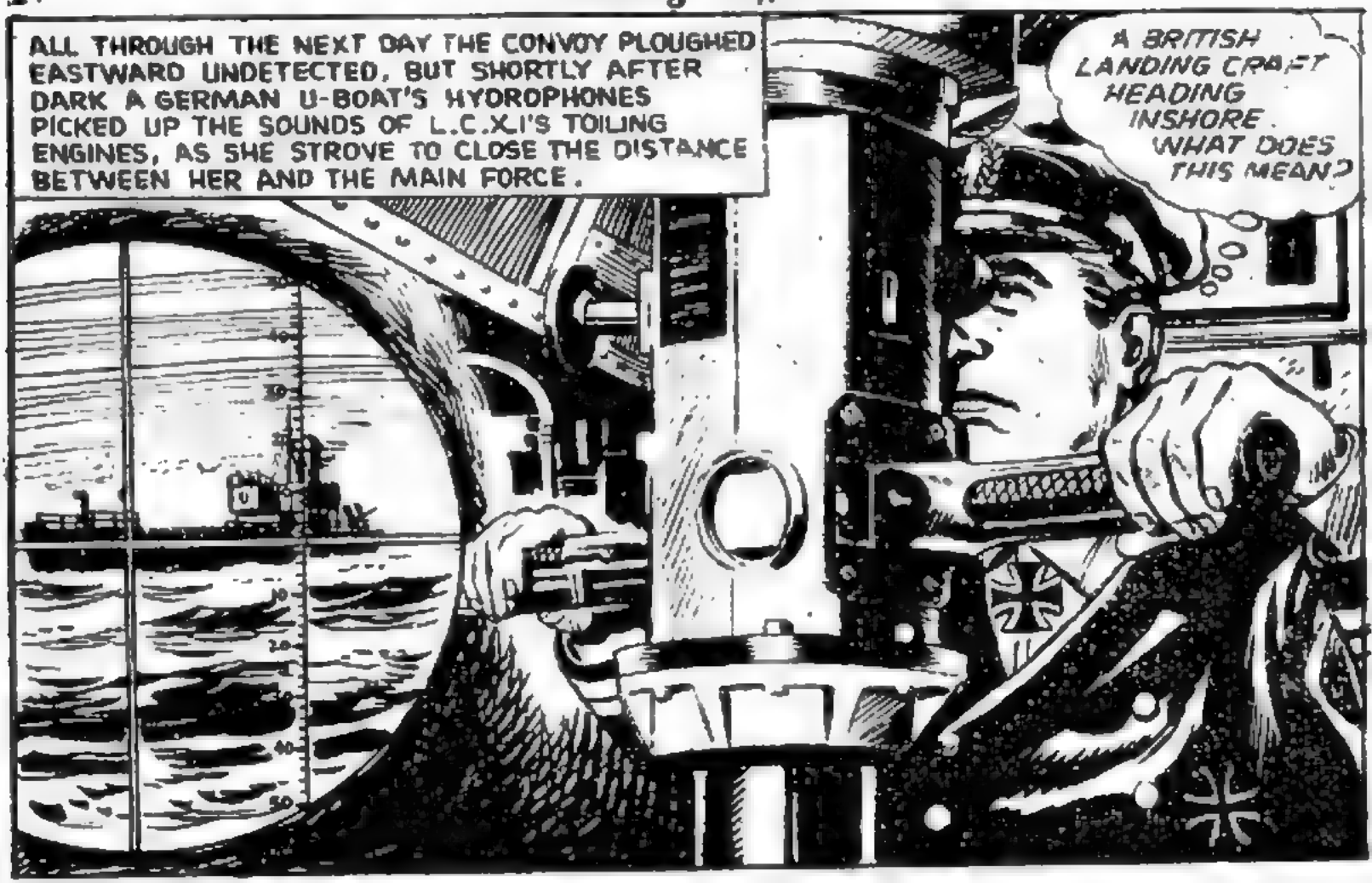
SUDDENLY DEPRESSED, THE OFFICERS OF THE RESERVE FLOTILLA DISPERSED TO THEIR VARIOUS SHIPS TO AWAIT ZERO HOUR AT 2100 THE FOLLOWING DAY. OILERS AND AMMUNITION LIGHTERS WERE BUSY DURING THE LAST HOURS, BUT STILL THE TIME DRAGGED. AT LAST, IT WAS TIME TO SLIP...

SLOWLY THE GREAT CAVALCADE OF WARSHIPS CLEARED THE ANCHORAGE AND SETTLED DOWN IN CONVOY FORMATION, FOR THE LONG THIRTY HOUR PULL THROUGH THE CHOPPY NORTHERN SEAS. L.C.T. 4 AND L.C.X.1 WERE THE VERY LAST TO LEAVE.
WELL, COX'N, WE'RE NOT LIKELY TO GET IN ANYBODY'S WAY SEEING WE'RE RIGHT ASTERN!
NO, SIR. THOUGH IT WOULDN'T SURPRISE ME IF THE WHOLE FLEET WAS SCATTERED BY MORNING WITH THIS SEA RUNNING.

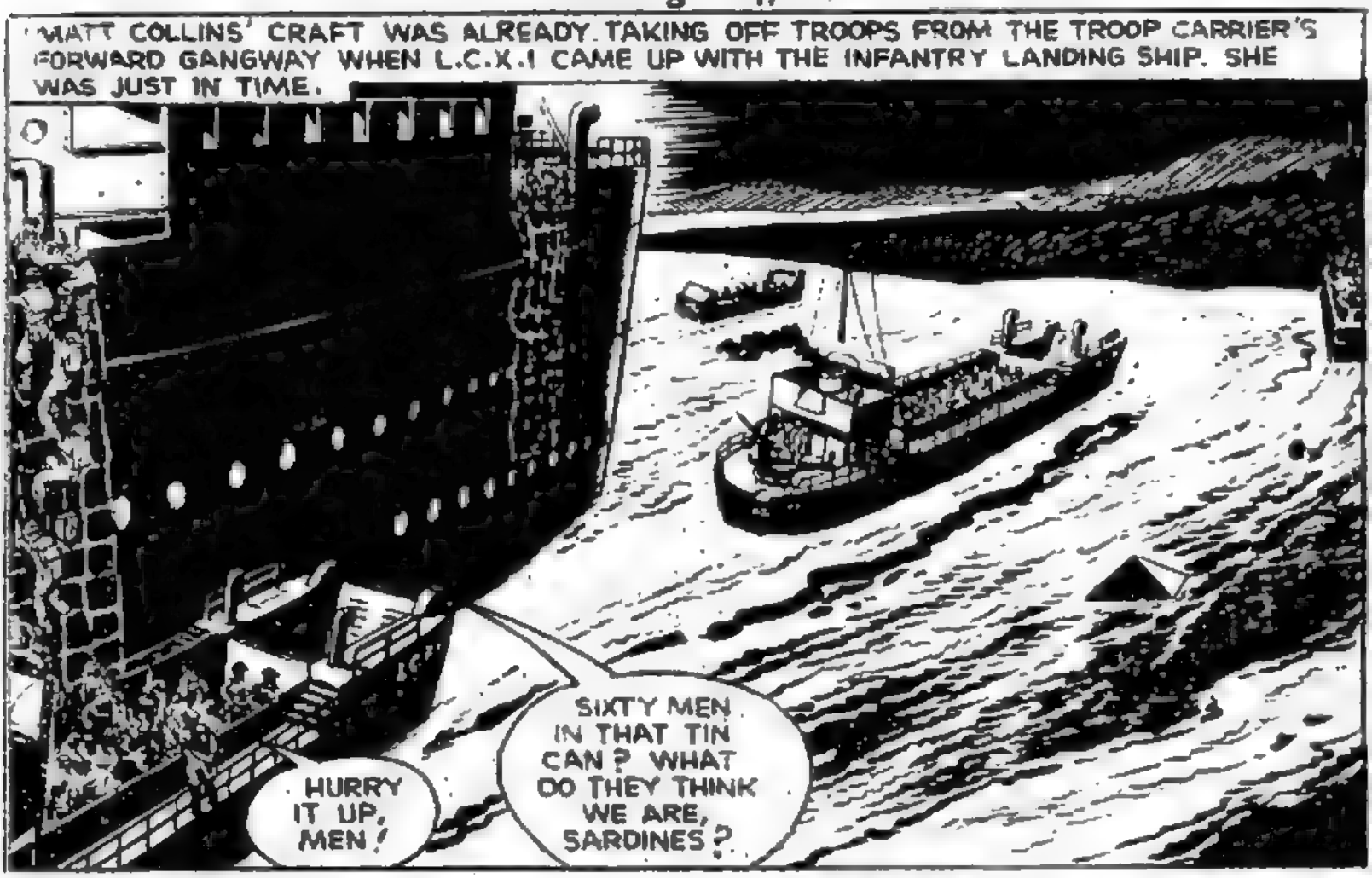
BUFFETED FOR SEVERAL HOURS WITHOUT RESPITE BY THE POUNDING DEEP-SEA ROLLERS, THE ILL-DESIGNED L.C.X.1 BEGAN TO PROTEST. THIS TIME IT WAS THE ENGINES WHICH WERE TO BETRAY THE DESIGNERS AND EMBARRASS HER HARD-WORKING CREW. HALF WAY THROUGH THE MIDDLE WATCH, JOCK TODD, THE ENGINEER, CALLED THE BRIDGE. HE DID NOT MINCE MATTERS.
THE PORT ENGINE BEARINGS ARE RUNNING HOT, SKIPPER. IT MEANS WE'LL HAVE TO RUN ON ONE ENGINE FOR A WHILE...MAYBE TWO HOURS.

JIM'S SPIRITS SANK TO THEIR LOWEST EBB AS HE ACCEPTED THE INEVITABLE REDUCTION IN SPEED. HE KNEW THEY WOULD DROP A LONG WAY BEHIND THE REST OF THE CONVOY.
MAKE TO FLOTILLA OFFICER 'MUST REDUCE SPEED FOR AT LEAST TWO HOURS DUE TO ENGINE TROUBLE.'
THERE'S A JINX ON THIS ACCURSED TUB.

IN THE STIFLING HEAT OF THE CRAMPED ENGINE-ROOM, JOCK TODD AND TAFF JONES BULLIED AND COAXED THE OVERWORKED ENGINE BACK TO LIFE. AT LAST L.C.X.1 PLOUGHED AHEAD ON BOTH SCREWS AGAIN. JOCK WENT UP TO THE BRIDGE AND DRANK COCOA WITH JIM.
I WOULDN'T ADVISE INCREASING REVS TO CATCH UP, SKIPPER... THAT ENGINE WOULD GO AGAIN.
H'M, I SUPPOSE THEY'LL REDUCE SPEED TONIGHT WHEN THEY GET NEARER THE COAST. WE'LL HAVE TO CATCH UP THEN, JOCK.


ALL THROUGH THE NEXT DAY THE CONVOY PLOUGHED EASTWARD UNDETECTED. BUT SHORTLY AFTER DARK A GERMAN U-BOAT'S HYDROPHONES PICKED UP THE SOUNDS OF L.C.X.I'S TOILING ENGINES, AS SHE STROVE TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HER AND THE MAIN FORCE.
A BRITISH LANDING CRAFT HEADING INSHORE. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

THE OPERATION WAS ALREADY GETTING UNDER WAY. THE FROGMEN HAD SLIPPED AWAY FROM THEIR DESTROYERS AND PADDLED NORTH TO THE MOUTH OF THE FIORD, AND THE ASSAULT COMMANDOS WERE NEARING THE BEACHES.


MATT COLLINS' CRAFT WAS ALREADY TAKING OFF TROOPS FROM THE TROOP CARRIER'S FORWARD GANGWAY WHEN L.C.X.1 CAME UP WITH THE INFANTRY LANDING SHIP. SHE WAS JUST IN TIME.
HURRY IT UP, MEN!
SIXTY MEN IN THAT TIN CAN? WHAT DO THEY THINK WE ARE, SARDINES?

BY ONE OF THE MANY COINCIDENCES THROWN UP BY THE WAR, THE ARMY OFFICER IN CHARGE WAS THE SAME CAPTAIN BARTON WHO HAD BEEN ON BOARD FOR THE TANK EXERCISE. HE LOOKED A LITTLE NONPLUSSED WHEN HE STEPPED ON BOARD AND RECOGNISED JIM.
WELCOME ABOARD ONCE MORE, SIR.
OH, NO... NOT AGAIN! ANY OTHER SHIP BUT THIS...

AS L.C.X.1 LURCHED CLEAR OF THE MOTHER SHIP, AN URGENT SIGNAL FLASHED FROM THE SHELTERED SIDE OF THE FLOTILLA OFFICER'S CRAFT...
IT SAYS 'STOP BOTH ENGINES, SIR, SUSPECT ENEMY SHIPPING ABOUT.''
GREAT SCOTT! SURELY THEY AREN'T ON TO US AT THE LAST MINUTE.
USMC

JIM CLAPPED HIS NIGHT GLASSES TO HIS EYES AND SCANNED THE HORIZON...
THE F.O. WAS RIGHT. THREE GERMAN E-BOATS! STAND BY, GUN CREW!

ON THE BRIDGE OF THE FIRST E-BOAT, THE NAZI CAPTAIN WAS GREEDILY SINGLING OUT HIS TARGETS.
ACHTUNG! STAND BY, TORPEDOES. WE'LL TAKE THE BIG MERCHANTMEN FIRST...
SIGNALMAN! FLASH A WARNING TO THE TROOP CARRIERS IMMEDIATELY. THEY'LL BE SITTING DUCKS!
THEY'VE FIRED A TINFISH, SIR!

JIM'S INSTANT ORDER TO OPEN FIRE WAS DROWNED BY THE CRASH OF RUSTY O'BRIEN'S OERLIKON...

DULL FLASHES OF CRIMSON SHOWED WHERE THE CANNON SHELLS BIT INTO THE E-BOAT'S THIN METAL HULL... AND SUDDENLY THE ENEMY BOAT ERUPTED INTO BRIGHT ORANGE FLAME. JIM TURNED TO FIND CAPTAIN BARTON AT HIS ELBOW.
WHAT THE DEUCE IS GOING ON, SKIPPER? YOU'VE GIVEN THE ALARM.
IT COULDN'T BE AVOIDED... THIS JERRY E-BOAT PATROL CHANCED UPON US. THE GAME WAS UP!

MEANWHILE, ON THE HILL OVERLOOKING THE BEACH, THE ARMY COMMANDOS HAD CARRIED OUT THEIR SABOTAGE WORK AGAINST THE RADAR STATION AND WERE RETIRING UNDER AN ENEMY FIRE THAT WAS MOUNTING TO A VENGEFUL CRESCENDO.
KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN AND MAKE FOR THE BEACH THE NAVY'S HANGING ON FOR US...

LIGHT GERMAN ARTILLERY HAD BEEN HURRIEDLY BROUGHT UP TO COVER THEIR LINE OF RETREAT...
AIM FOR THE LANDING CRAFT... THE ENGLANDERS ARE SLIPPING AWAY!

BULLETS AND SHELLS THRASHED THE WATER TO A FOAM AS THE COMMANDOS WADED TOWARDS THEIR TINY ASSAULT CRAFT, SEVERAL OF WHICH WERE SUNK BEFORE THEY COULD BACK OFF-SHORE.

REPORTS OF THE RAID HAD BEEN FLASHED TO LUFTWAFFE AIRFIELDS AND ENEMY FIGHTER-BOMBERS APPEARED OVER THE BEACH-HEAD...
ACHTUNG! RED STAFFEL - PRIMARY TARGETS, THE LARGE SHIPS... THEN STRAFE THE LANDING BARGES!
PTOFLU

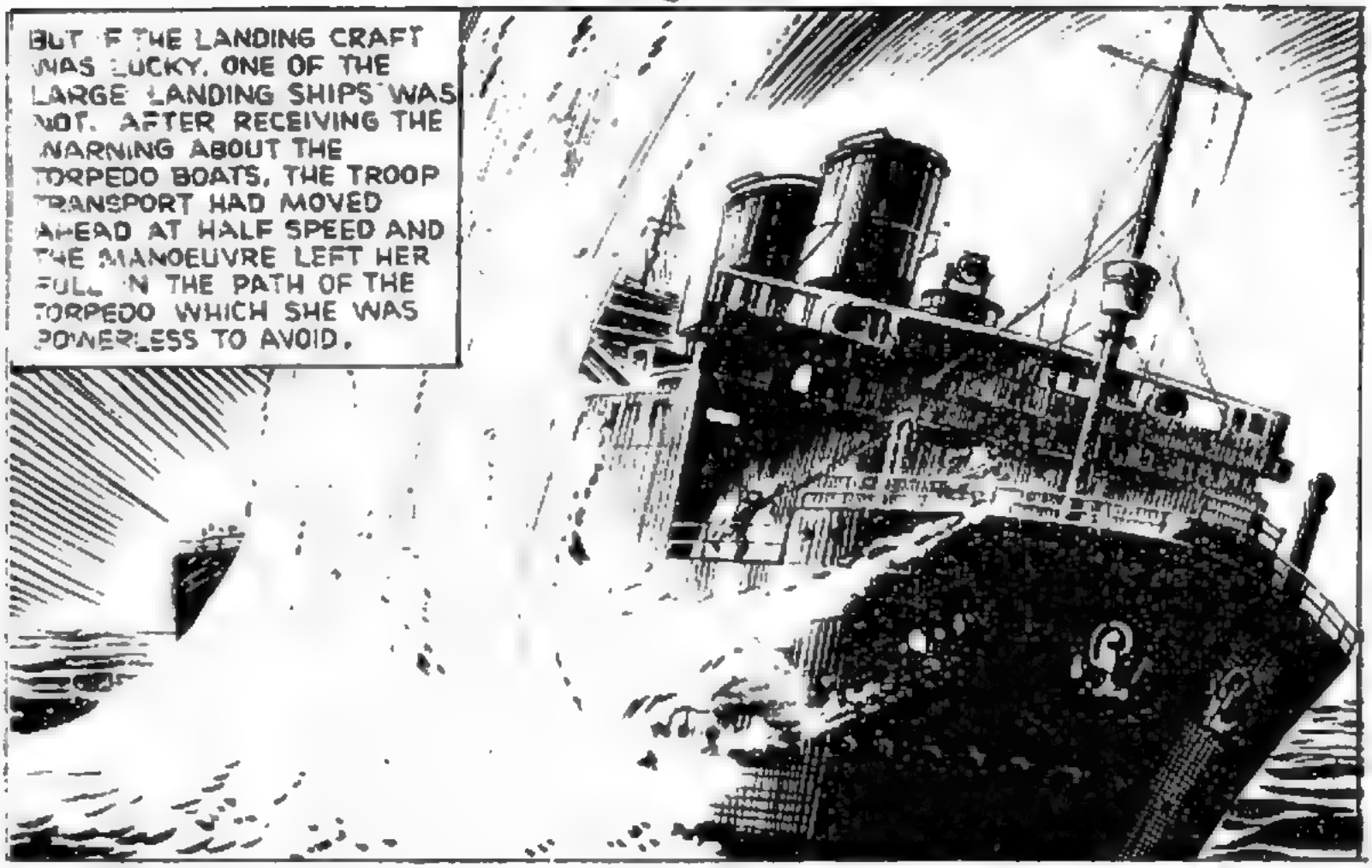
AS THE BOMBS BEGAN TO WHISTLE DOWN, L.C.X.I WAS STILL CIRCLING AIMLESSLY WITHOUT ORDERS AS TO HER FUTURE. HER HUMAN CARGO WAS GETTING RESTIVE.
WHY DON'T THEY DUMP US ASHORE WHERE WE'RE NEEDED... OR GET TO HECK OUT OF HERE? WE'RE BOUND TO CATCH A PACKET IN A MINUTE!
KEEP SILENCE DOWN THERE! WE'RE NOT MOVING IN WITHOUT ORDERS!

MEANWHILE, THE ENEMY E-BOATS WERE SHAPING FOR HIGH SPEED HIT AND RUN ATTACKS...
TINFISH! TINFISH ON THE STARBOARD QUARTER!

A SILVERY LINE SUDDENLY ARROWED THROUGH THE DARK WATER... STRAIGHT FOR THE SIDE OF L.C.X.I.
FULL AHEAD BOTH! HARD A-STARBOARD!
L C X I

FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE...

BUT NOTHING HAPPENED... THE DEADLY TORPEDO PASSED RIGHT UNDER THE SHALLOW DRAFT LANDING CRAFT.
PHEW! THAT WAS CLOSE... IT MUST HAVE SCRAPED SOME OF THE BARNACLES OFF THE BOTTOM!
LUMME! I THOUGHT OUR NUMBER WAS UP!


BUT IF THE LANDING CRAFT WAS LUCKY, ONE OF THE LARGE LANDING SHIPS WAS NOT. AFTER RECEIVING THE WARNING ABOUT THE TORPEDO BOATS, THE TROOP TRANSPORT HAD MOVED AHEAD AT HALF SPEED AND THE MANOEUVRE LEFT HER FULL IN THE PATH OF THE TORPEDO WHICH SHE WAS POWERLESS TO AVOID.

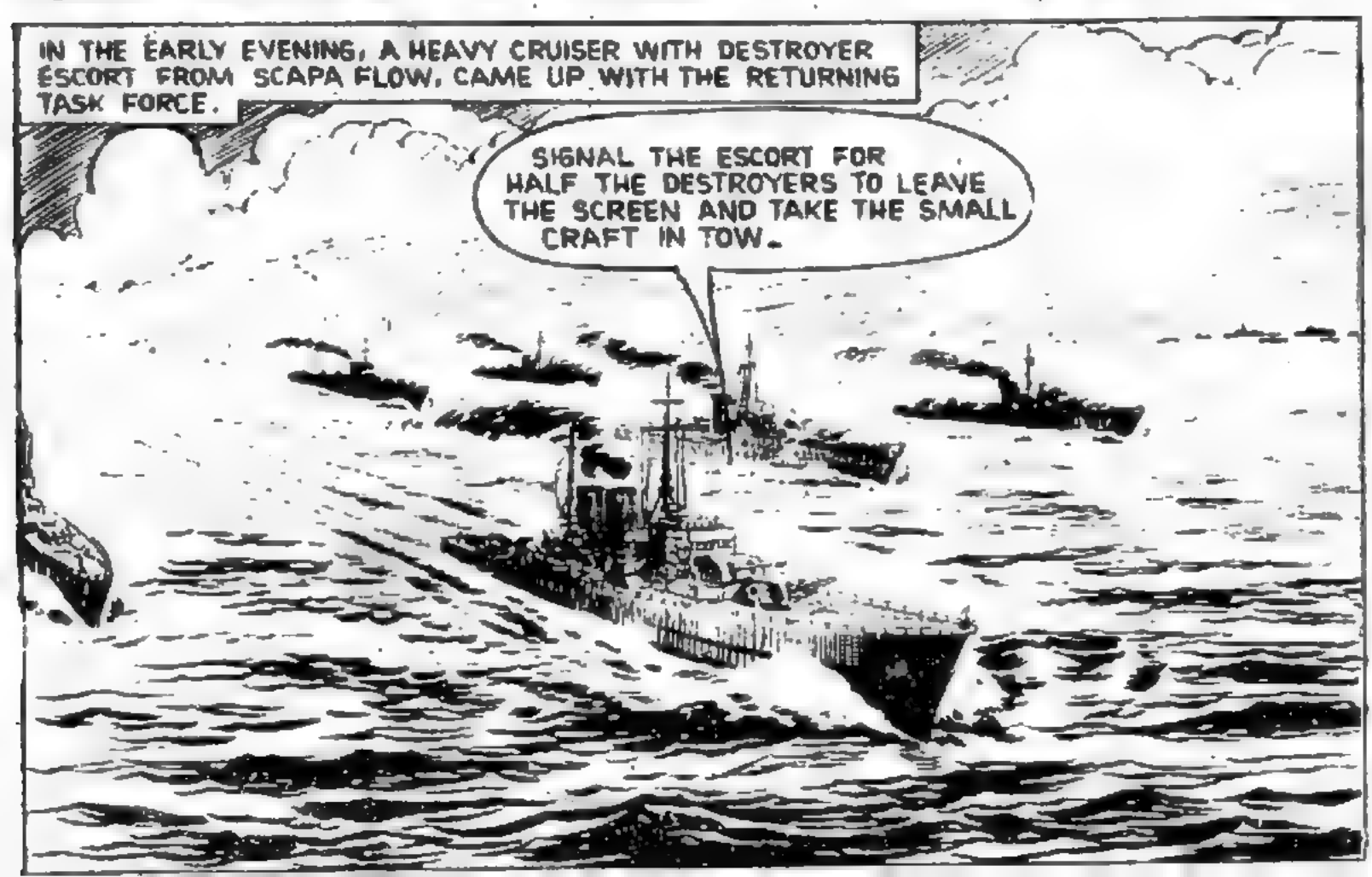
MEANWHILE, MORE GERMAN BOMBERS HAD ARRIVED. THEY ATTACKED THE SHIPPING SYSTEMATICALLY, CAUSING SEVERAL CASUALTIES AMONG THE ASSAULT CRAFT AND LARGER LANDING CRAFT.
105
LCM
LCR

THE HEINKELS SOON DISCOVERED THE TORPEDOED TRANSPORT'S CRIPPLED CONDITION AND CONCENTRATED THEIR ATTACK ON HER...
THAT'LL BE ANOTHER ONE FOR YOUR TALLY, RUSTY!

L.C.X.1'S SOLITARY OERLIKON COULD DO LITTLE TO STAVE OFF THE LANDING SHIP'S FATE.
SHE'S HAD IT. WE COULDN'T GO BACK WITH HER IF WE WANTED TO.
NO, SIR. I'M AFRAID YOU'RE STUCK WITH US. I'VE HAD A SIGNAL TO BREAK OFF THE ENGAGEMENT AND RETURN TO BASE.

ALTHOUGH IN CONSIDERABLE DISORDER, THE BATTERED LANDING CRAFT AND ESCORT VESSELS GRADUALLY BEGAN TO DRAW CLEAR OF THE COAST OUT OF RANGE OF THE ARTILLERY FIRE.
COMMANDO
DON'T FANCY A TRIP BACK TO BLIGHTY IN THIS MATCH-BOX.
NOR ME! I WON'T SO MUCH AS PUT ME FOOT IN A ROWING BOAT AFTER THIS LOT'S OVER!

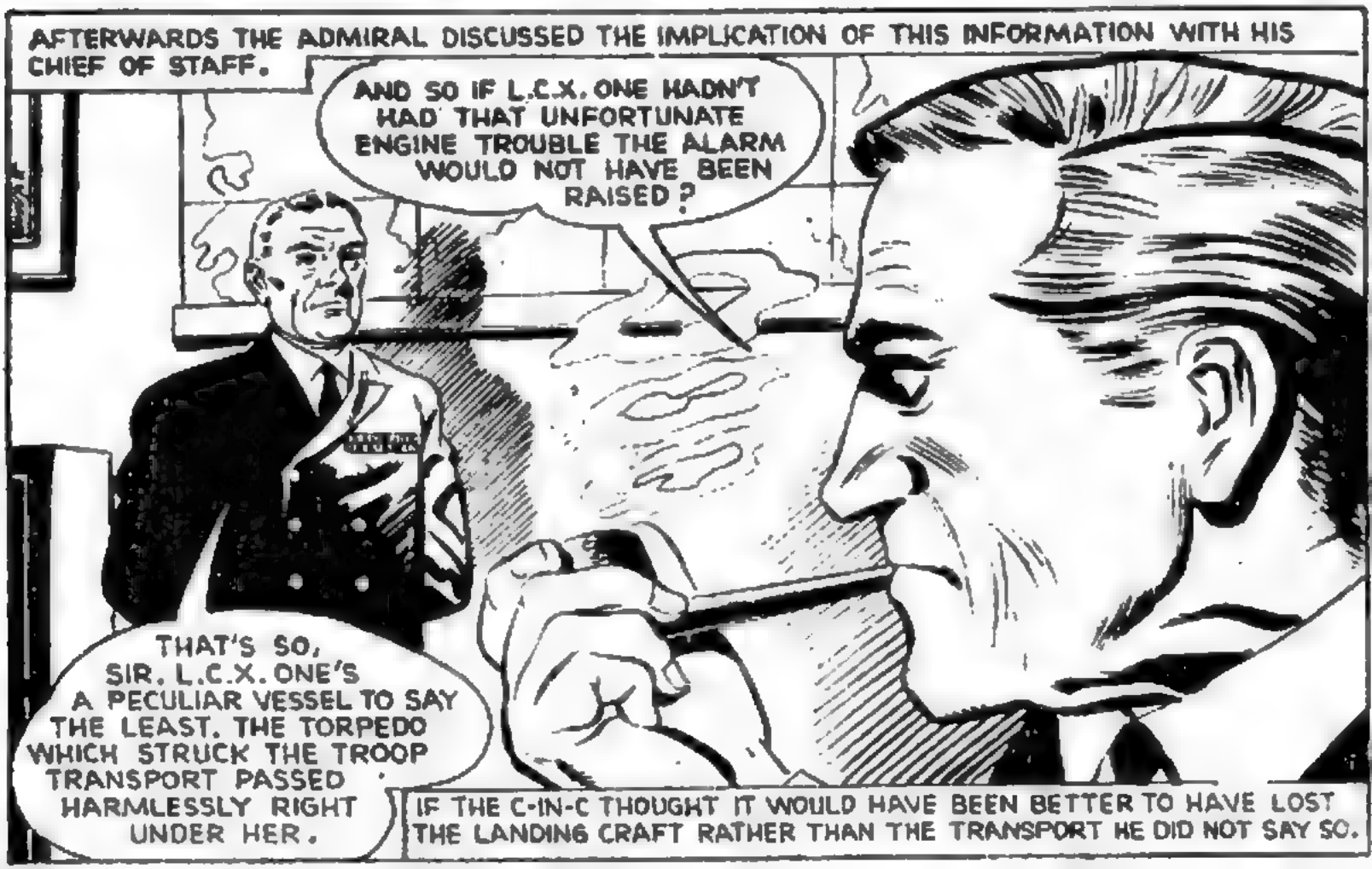
DAYLIGHT AND A FEEBLE SUN CAME AS A SMALL RELIEF TO THE OVERWORKED SAILORS AND THEIR CRAMPED PASSENGERS WHO WERE WET AND COLD WITH THE SPRAY THAT EVERLASTINGLY SWEPT OVER THE STEEL SIDES.
BEST WE CAN DO, MATES. BULLY AND BREAD AND A CUP O' CHAR.


IN THE EARLY EVENING, A HEAVY CRUISER WITH DESTROYER ESCORT FROM SCAPA FLOW, CAME UP WITH THE RETURNING TASK FORCE.
SIGNAL THE ESCORT FOR HALF THE DESTROYERS TO LEAVE THE SCREEN AND TAKE THE SMALL CRAFT IN TOW.

AT LAST THE BEDRAGGLED, BATTLE-SCARRED ARMADA SLIPPED THROUGH THE BOOM INTO THE FLEET ANCHORAGE. L.C.X.1'S CREW HAD BEEN AT ACTION STATIONS WITH SCARCELY ANY RESPITE FOR MORE THAN TWO DAYS... BUT IT WAS THE SOLDIER PASSENGERS WHO HAD SUFFERED MOST.
POOR BLIGHTERS! THEY'VE HAD A ROUGH TRIP... IT'S NO PICNIC ON THESE LANDING CRAFT, PARTICULARLY THIS FLOATING COFFIN!
LCM

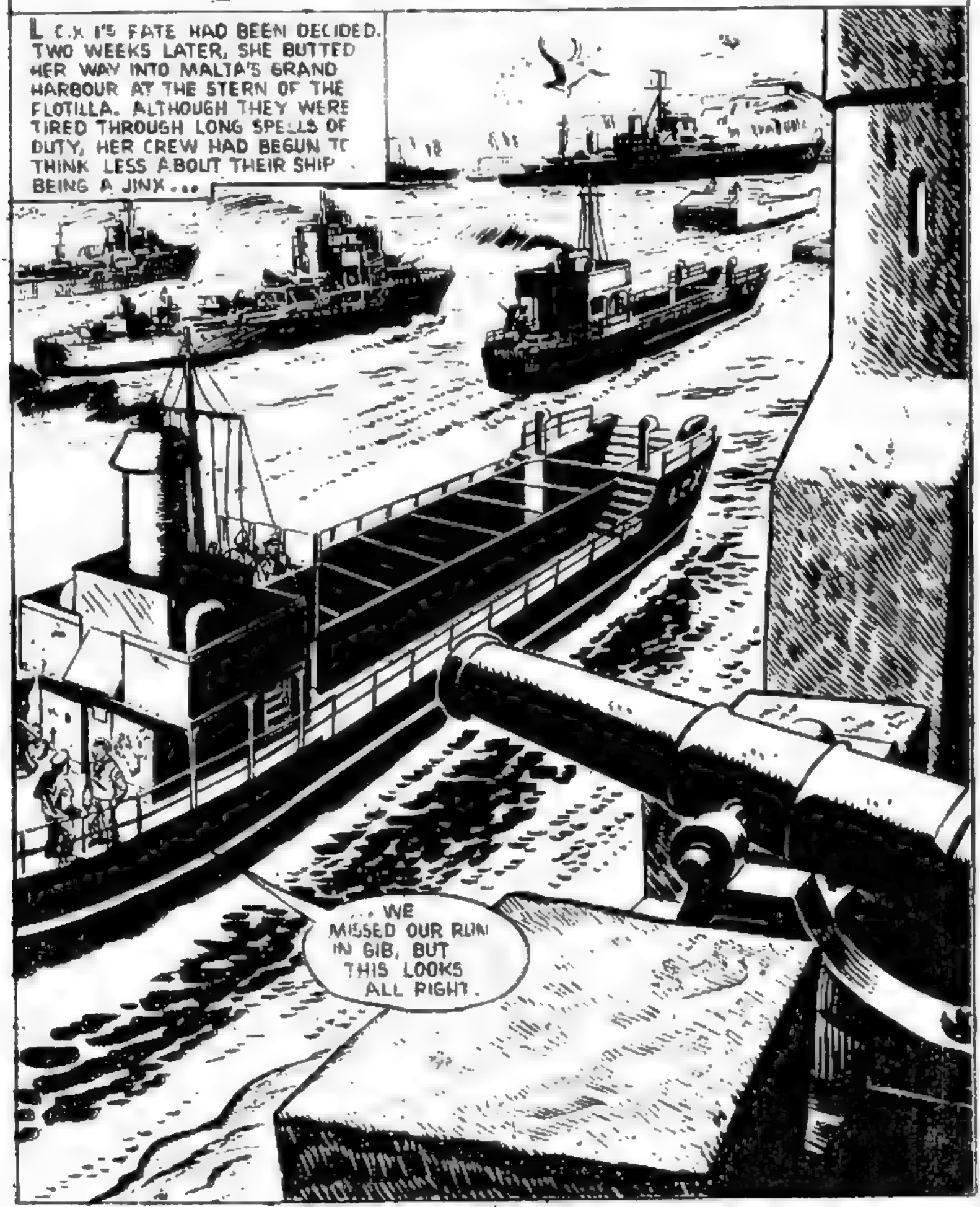
THE B.B.C. BROADCAST NEWS OF THE RAID ON THE NORWEGIAN COAST GAVE JIM PAGE AND HIS CREW SOME QUIET SATISFACTION. IT HAD BEEN THEIR FIRST OPERATION... AND THEY HAD NOT DISGRACED THEMSELVES.
... IN SPITE OF THE ALARM THE RADAR STATION WAS PARTIALLY DEMOLISHED... SEVERAL ENEMY SHIPS WERE BADLY DAMAGED BY LIMPET MINES AND OVER A HUNDRED NORWEGIANS ESCAPED FROM NAZI OPPRESSION...

BUT UNKNOWN TO THE LANDING CRAFT'S CREW, EVENTS WERE HAPPENING WHICH WERE TO HAVE A DIRECT BEARING ON HER IMMEDIATE FUTURE. A BRITISH DESTROYER HAD ATTACKED AND SUNK THE U-BOAT WHICH HAD FIRST SIGHTED L.C.X.I AND RAISED THE ALARM. AMONGST THE SURVIVORS WAS ONE OF HER OFFICERS WHO WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE COMMANDER OF THE OPERATION.
...AND YOU SAY YOU SIGHTED THIS LANDING CRAFT ALONE, LONG BEFORE YOU FOUND THE OTHER SHIPS IN THE FORCE?
JAWOHL, MEIN ADMIRAL. YOUR POOR LITTLE COAL SCUTTLE OF A BOAT HAD FALLEN BEHIND AND DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER TO REGAIN HER STATION.

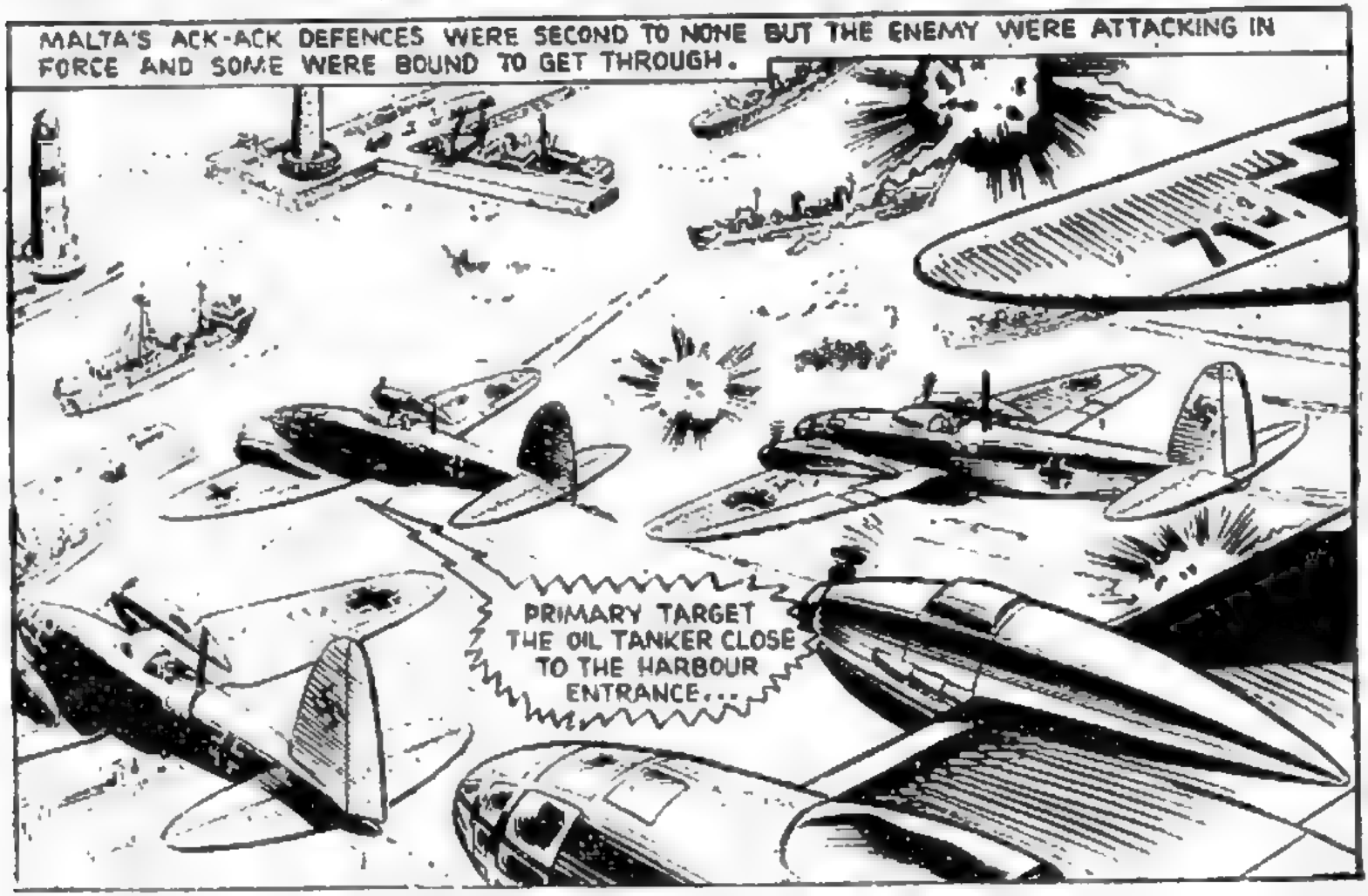

AFTERWARDS THE ADMIRAL DISCUSSED THE IMPLICATION OF THIS INFORMATION WITH HIS CHIEF OF STAFF.
AND SO IF L.C.X. ONE HADN'T HAD THAT UNFORTUNATE ENGINE TROUBLE THE ALARM WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN RAISED?
THAT'S SO, SIR. L.C.X. ONE'S A PECULIAR VESSEL TO SAY THE LEAST. THE TORPEDO WHICH STRUCK THE TROOP TRANSPORT PASSED HARMLESSLY RIGHT UNDER HER.
IF THE C-IN-C THOUGHT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO HAVE LOST THE LANDING CRAFT RATHER THAN THE TRANSPORT HE DID NOT SAY SO.

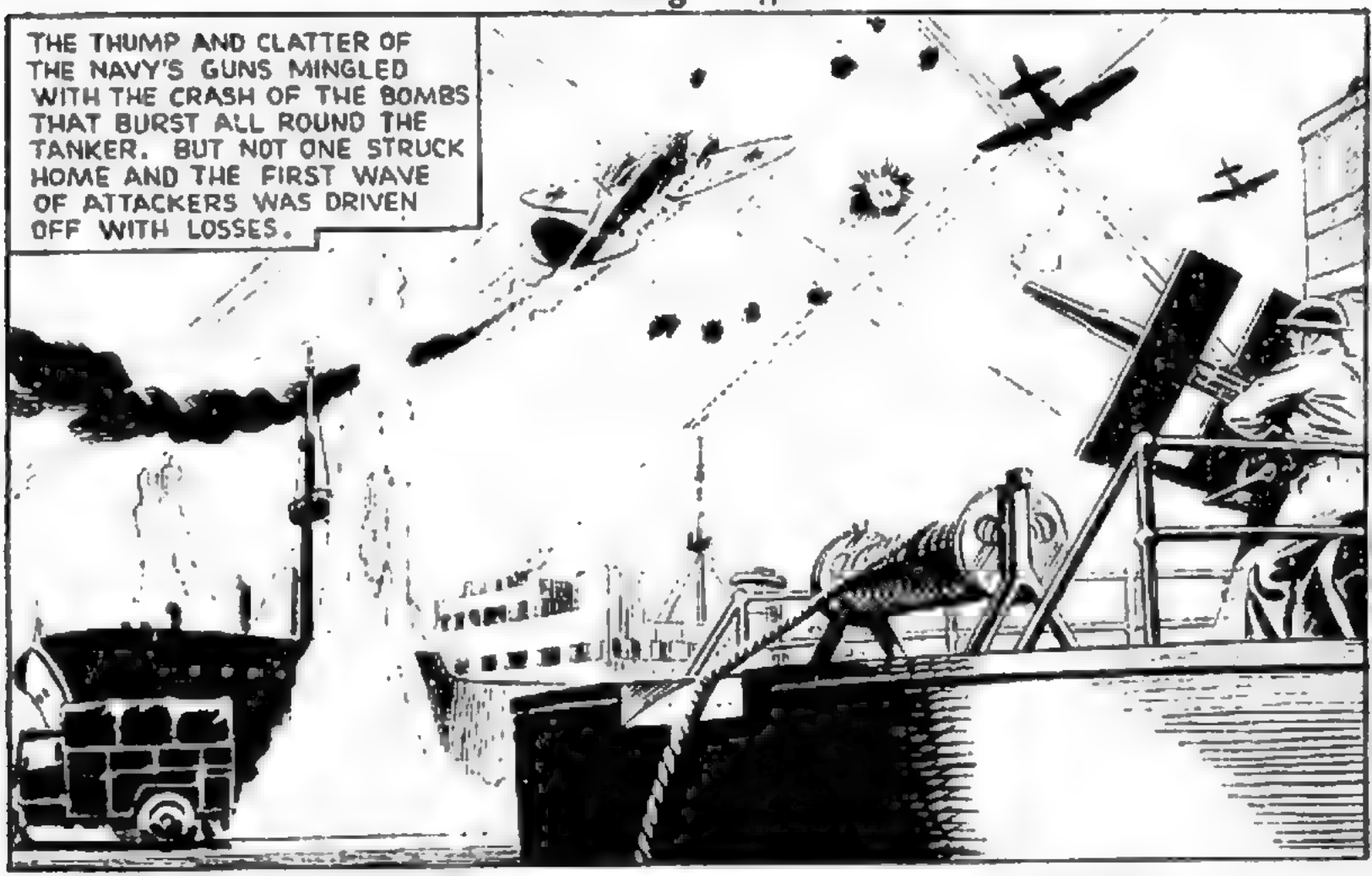
AN HOUR LATER, THE TWO SENIOR OFFICERS WERE STANDING ALONE ON THE QUARTERDECK LOOKING ACROSS THE CROWDED ANCHORAGE TO WHERE L.C.X.1 WAS SWINGING ROUND HER BUOY.
LCX
THAT'S L.C.X.ONE, IS IT ... NOT EXACTLY ELEGANT, IS SHE? PERHAPS IT'S JUST AS WELL THE NAVY DIDN'T HAVE COMMANDS LIKE THAT WHEN WE FIRST TOOK OUR COMMISSIONS, MAX.
I'M WITH YOU THERE, SIR.
DO YOU RECALL THAT SIGNAL LAST WEEK FROM C-IN-C MEDITERRANEAN, SIR, URGENTLY REQUIRING MORE LANDING CRAFT? THIS MIGHT BE AN OPPORTUNITY...
YOU'VE GOT A POINT THERE, MAX. LET ME SEE. L.C.X.ONE IS ONE OF OSBORNE'S FLOTILLA, ISN'T SHE?

Chapter 3. MALTA MISFIT



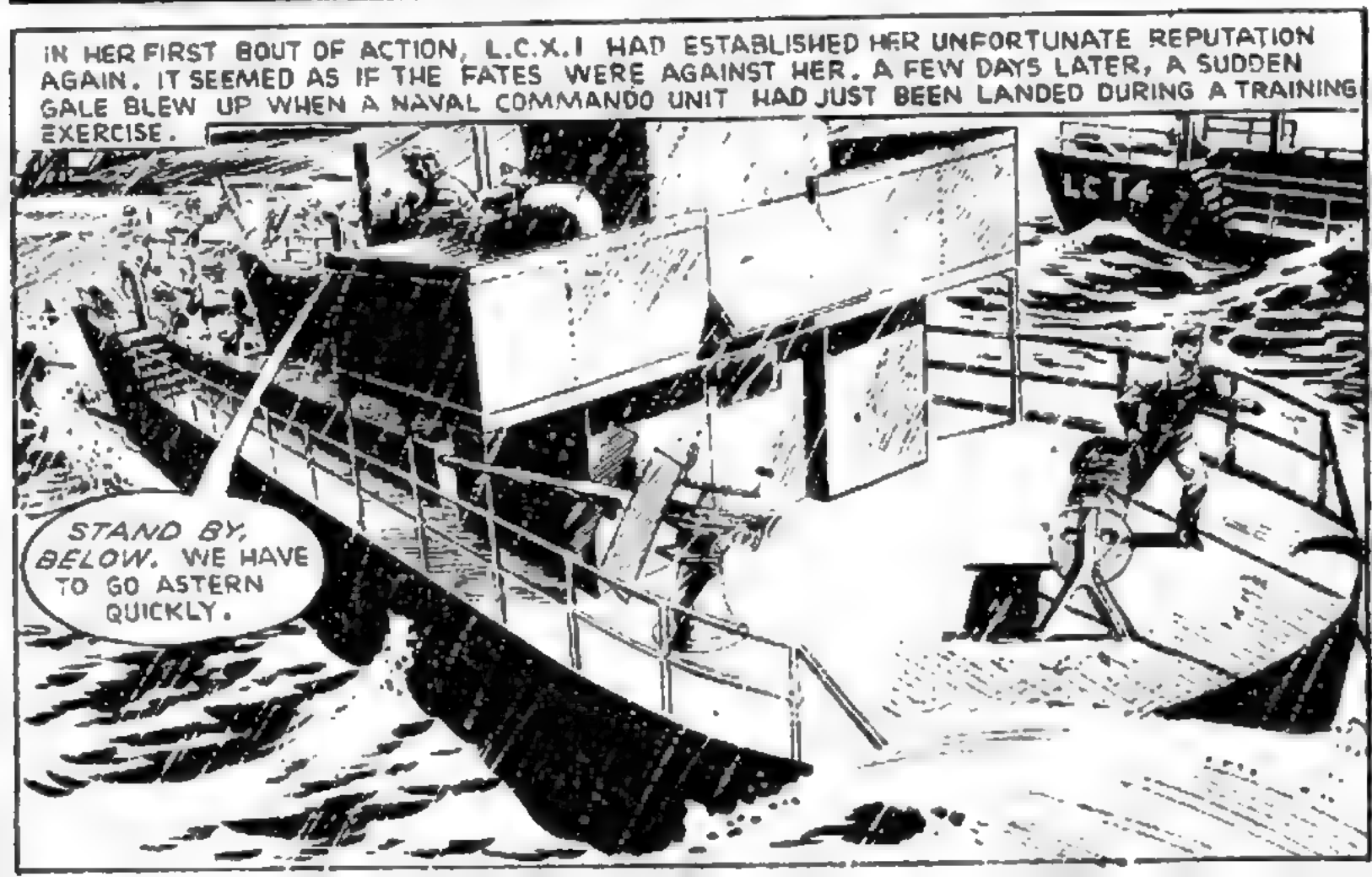
ON THE RUN THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN THEY HAD FOUGHT OFF MANY AIR ATTACKS, AND NOW THEY HAD REACHED THE GALLANT ISLAND WHICH WAS TO SUFFER TWO THOUSAND BOMBING RAIDS BEFORE THE WAR WAS OVER. BEFORE DUSK THAT NIGHT YET ANOTHER BOMBING RAID WAS IN PROGRESS.
GUN CREWS, CLOSE UP!
LOOKS AS IF VALETTA IS CATCHING A PACKET!


MALTA'S ACK-ACK DEFENCES WERE SECOND TO NONE BUT THE ENEMY WERE ATTACKING IN FORCE AND SOME WERE BOUND TO GET THROUGH.
PRIMARY TARGET THE OIL TANKER CLOSE TO THE HARBOUR ENTRANCE...


THE THUMP AND CLATTER OF THE NAVY'S GUNS MINGLED WITH THE CRASH OF THE BOMBS THAT BURST ALL ROUND THE TANKER. BUT NOT ONE STRUCK HOME AND THE FIRST WAVE OF ATTACKERS WAS DRIVEN OFF WITH LOSSES.

THE NEXT FLIGHT OF HEINKELS CAME IN LOW, THE NEAREST BEING NOT FIFTY FEET FROM L.C.X.1. RUSTY O'BRIEN'S OERLIKON PUNCHED A STREAM OF SHELLS INTO A BLOATED BLACK-CROSSED FUSELAGE...
GOTCHER, MY BLACK BEAUTY!
HE'S A FLAMER!

LIKE A FIERY COMET, THE STRICKEN BOMBER HURTLED ONWARDS AND TO THE HORROR OF THE LANDING CRAFT'S CREW, CRASHED WITH A TERRIBLE EXPLOSION INTO THE NAVAL SIGNAL STATION ON THE HILLSIDE...
OH – NO!
AND THE FIRST ELATED CRIES OF SUCCESS WERE SUDDENLY SILENCED... SOMEONE HAD PAID A HEAVY PRICE FOR THAT VICTORY.


IN HER FIRST BOUT OF ACTION, L.C.X.I HAD ESTABLISHED HER UNFORTUNATE REPUTATION AGAIN. IT SEEMED AS IF THE FATES WERE AGAINST HER. A FEW DAYS LATER, A SUDDEN GALE BLEW UP WHEN A NAVAL COMMANDO UNIT HAD JUST BEEN LANDED DURING A TRAINING EXERCISE.
LCT 4
STAND BY, BELOW. WE HAVE TO GO ASTERN QUICKLY.

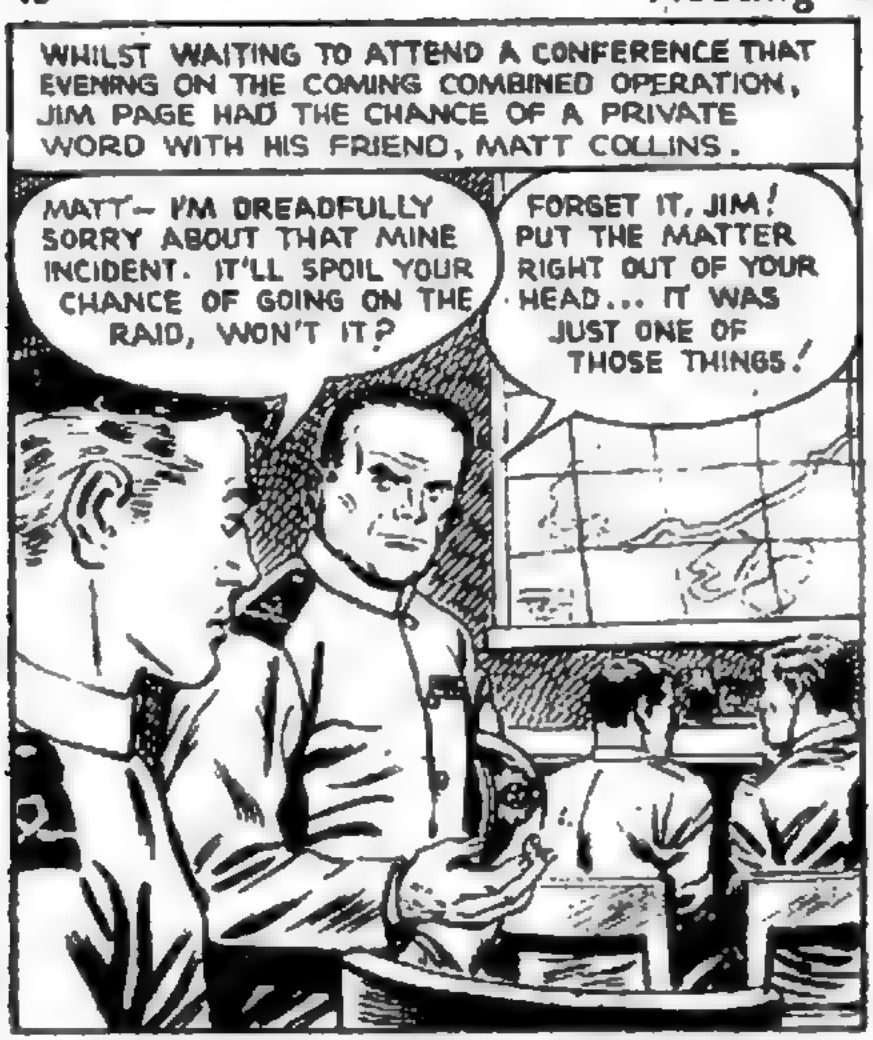
Floating Coffins

UNDER THE COMBINED POWER OF THE TWO CRAFTS' ENGINES, L.C.X.1 RELUCTANTLY CAME UNSTUCK. THE HAWSER WAS CAST OFF TO IRONIC CHEERING, AND SHE STARTED THE JOURNEY BACK TO PORT. L.C.T.4 TUCKED HERSELF CLOSE IN ASTERN AND THEN ...

GREAT HEAVENS! MATT'S HIT A MINE ... BUT HOW DID WE MISS IT?

THE BOW DOOR OF L.C.T.4 WAS SHATTERED AND SEVERAL COMMANDOS WERE INJURED BUT SHE STAYED AFLOAT. IT WAS THE TURN OF L.C.X.1 TO TOW *HER* TO SAFETY.

... AND THEN PEOPLE WONDER WHY SAILORS ARE SUPERSTITIOUS!


WHILST WAITING TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE THAT EVENING ON THE COMING COMBINED OPERATION, JIM PAGE HAD THE CHANCE OF A PRIVATE WORD WITH HIS FRIEND, MATT COLLINS.
MATT— I'M DREADFULLY SORRY ABOUT THAT MINE INCIDENT. IT'LL SPOIL YOUR CHANCE OF GOING ON THE RAID, WON'T IT?
FORGET IT, JIM! PUT THE MATTER RIGHT OUT OF YOUR HEAD... IT WAS JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS!

JIM FELT BETTER AT THE OTHER'S ATTITUDE, BUT LIEUTENANT COMMANDER OSBORNE'S WORDS A FEW MOMENTS LATER GAVE HIM A NASTY SHOCK.
AH, PAGE! YOU WON'T BE COMING WITH US TO PANTELLARIA. THE C-IN-C'S ASKED FOR YOU TO STAY BEHIND FOR A DIFFERENT ASSIGNMENT.
I HOPE THEY AREN'T PENALISING JIM FOR WHAT HAPPENED TODAY

TWO DAYS LATER, MATT COLLINS' CRAFT WAS IN DRY DOCK AND THE CREW OF L.C.X.I WERE ENJOYING AN EXTRA RUN ASHORE TO THEIR FAVOURITE BATHING SPOT. THE SIGHT OF THE OTHER LANDING CRAFT STREAMING OFF TO PANTELLARIA, HOWEVER, RATHER SPOILED THE OCCASION.
I DON'T KNOW, OUR OLD TUB NEVER DID SEEM TO FIT IN WITH ALL THE OTHERS.
YOU'RE RIGHT THERE, COX'N... MAYBE WE'LL DO BETTER ON OUR OWN.

Floating Coffins

Chapter 4. TOBRUK RUN

FOR DAYS, BRITISH LIGHTWEIGHT TANKS, SEEKING TO BREAK THROUGH ROMMEL'S RING OF STEEL AND RELIEVE TOBRUK, HAD BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. AFTER BEING REPULSED MANY TIMES, THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMOURED DIVISION CONFERRED WITH HIS OFFICERS.

WE KNOCKED OUT SIX OR SEVEN OF THEIR MARK FOURS, SIR BUT THEY KEPT ON COMING!

YES, THEY OUTNUMBER US TWO TO ONE, MAJOR — BUT WE'VE JUST GOT TO KEEP TRYING. THE SITUATION IN THE PORT IS CRITICAL.

THE PORT ITSELF WAS SUBJECTED TO INCESSANT AIR ATTACKS. SHIPS WHICH HAD FOUGHT THEIR WAY IN FROM MALTA OR MERSAH MATRUH WERE SUNK OR BADLY DAMAGED BEFORE THEY HAD EVEN DROPPED ANCHOR. EVERY ROUND OF AMMUNITION, EVERY GALLON OF FUEL, EVERY SCRAP OF FOOD WAS DESPERATELY NEEDED.

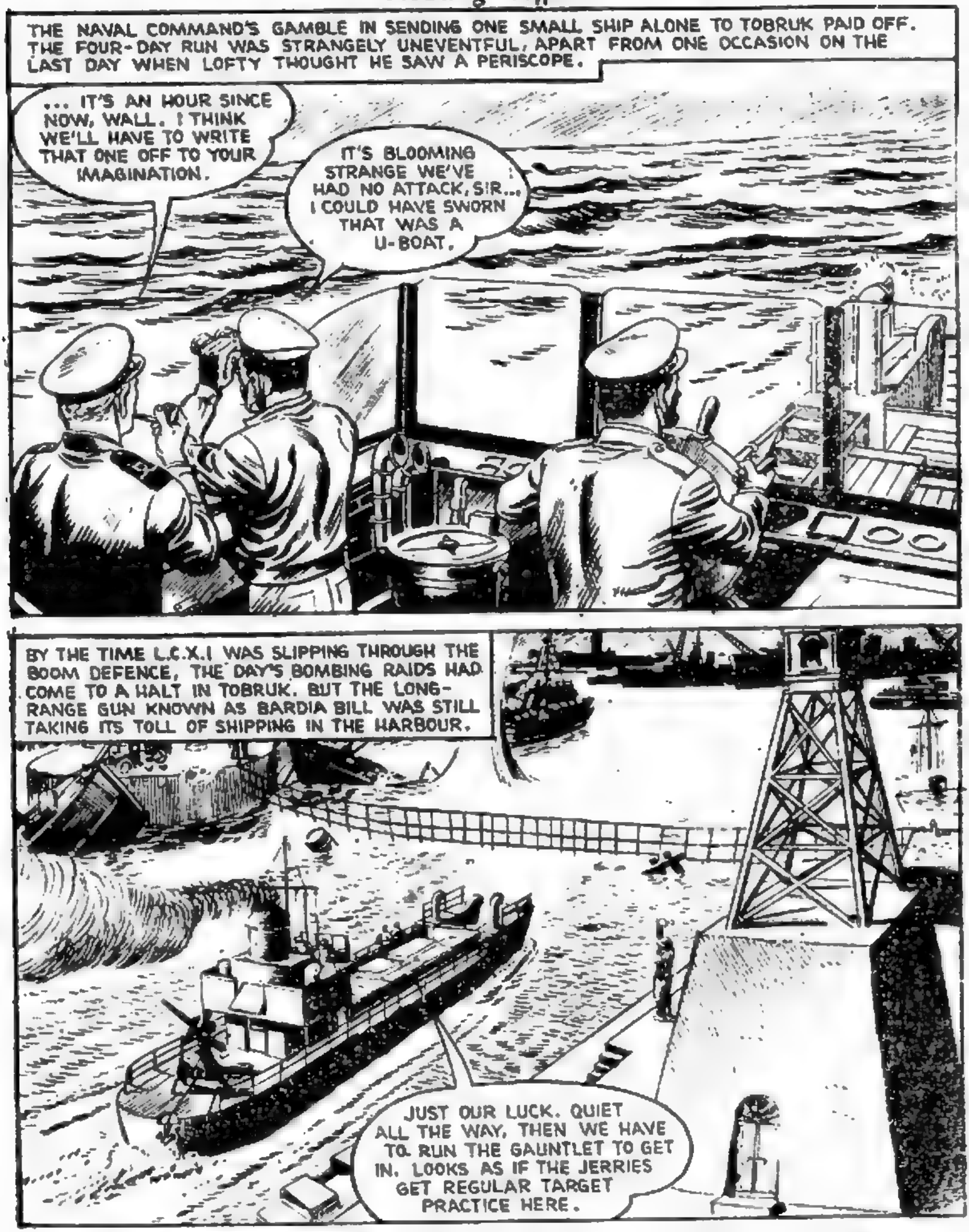
WHEN THE DIVE BOMBERS LET UP A GERMAN LONG-RANGE GUN FROM THE BARDIA SIDE BEGAN TO DROP ITS HEAVY PROJECTILES INTO THE HARBOUR WITH NERVE-SHAKING REGULARITY. WEARY SOLDIERS WITHDRAWN FROM THE FRONT LINE TO UNLOAD SHIPPING BEGAN TO DREAD IT.
HECK! THERE GOES OLD BARDIA BILL AGAIN YOU COULD SET YOUR BLOOMING WATCH BY HIM
AIN'T SURE I WOULDN'T RATHER BE UP IN THE LINE THAN ON THIS JOB MATE.

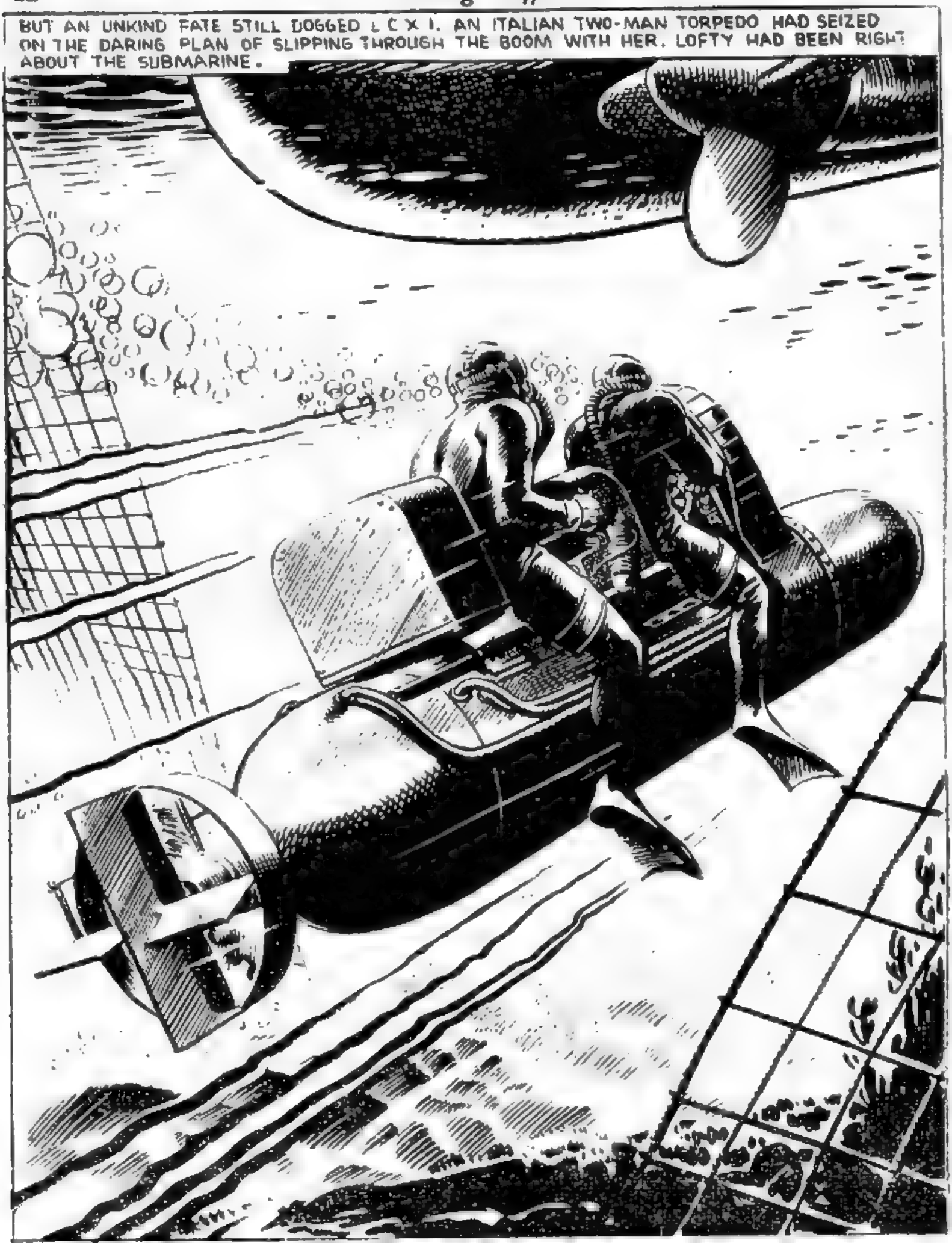
THE OFFICER IN CHARGE OF STORES KNEW BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT TOBRUK COULD NOT HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER.
I'M AFRAID THAT'S THE LOT FOR THIS TRIP SIR.
YES, INDEED... AND IT DOESN'T AMOUNT TO VERY MUCH REALLY DOES IT? THE GUNS ARE RATIONED TO TEN ROUNDS A DAY, THE TANKS TO A PATROL OF THREE MILES.
QUARTERMASTER

ALL FOR A FEW YARDS OF SAND AND A PORT THAT IS PRACTICALLY USELESS. I WONDER IF IT'S REALLY WORTHWHILE HOLDING ON ANY LONGER?

MEANWHILE, IN MALTA, L.C.X.1 WAS LOADING ITS SMALL BUT VITAL CARGO FOR TOBRUK.
WHAT ELSE IS TO COME, SERGEANT?
A FEW THOUSAND ROUNDS OF THREE-O-THREE... AND HALF A TON OF DEHYDRATED POTATOES.
DEHYDRATED SPUDS... THAT'LL RAISE THE LADS' MORALE!
CX1

IT SEEMS WE'VE FOUND OUR LEVEL AT LAST, SIR, GENERAL MUGABOUT AND STORES SHIP.
MAYBE, COX'N, BUT TOBRUK MUST BE DESPERATE INDEED IF ONE SMALL SHIPLOAD OF AMMO AND FOOD CAN MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE.


THE NAVAL COMMAND'S GAMBLE IN SENDING ONE SMALL SHIP ALONE TO TOBRUK PAID OFF. THE FOUR-DAY RUN WAS STRANGELY UNEVENTFUL, APART FROM ONE OCCASION ON THE LAST DAY WHEN LOFTY THOUGHT HE SAW A PERISCOPE.
... IT'S AN HOUR SINCE NOW, WALL. I THINK WE'LL HAVE TO WRITE THAT ONE OFF TO YOUR IMAGINATION.
IT'S BLOOMING STRANGE WE'VE HAD NO ATTACK, SIR... I COULD HAVE SWORN THAT WAS A U-BOAT.
BY THE TIME L.C.X.1 WAS SLIPPING THROUGH THE BOOM DEFENCE, THE DAY'S BOMBING RAIDS HAD COME TO A HALT IN TOBRUK. BUT THE LONG-RANGE GUN KNOWN AS BARDIA BILL WAS STILL TAKING ITS TOLL OF SHIPPING IN THE HARBOUR.
JUST OUR LUCK. QUIET ALL THE WAY, THEN WE HAVE TO RUN THE GAUNTLET TO GET IN. LOOKS AS IF THE JERRIES GET REGULAR TARGET PRACTICE HERE.


BUT AN UNKIND FATE STILL DOGGED L C X I. AN ITALIAN TWO-MAN TORPEDO HAD SEIZED ON THE DARING PLAN OF SLIPPING THROUGH THE BOOM WITH HER. LOFTY HAD BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THE SUBMARINE.

A WORKING PARTY OF SOLDIERS WAS RUSHED TO THE JETTY AS SOON AS THE LANDING CRAFT CLEARED THE BOOM.
HURRY IT UP, WEN. HERE SHE COMES.

ALTHOUGH L. M. PAGE WAS VERY TIRED AFTER THE LONG TRIP, THE ARMY OFFICER'S WELCOME AND HIS OBVIOUS SINCERITY DID A LOT TO CHEER H M.
YOU'VE NO IDEA HOW IT BUCKS US UP TO SEE A TINY SHIP LIKE YOURS SLIPPING INTO HARBOUR.
WE'RE DELIGHTED TO PLAY OUR PART, I ASSURE YOU, SIR..

THE UNLOADING WAS DONE IN DOUBLE-QUICK TIME AND WHEN HIS CRAFT WAS CLEAR, JIM STROLLED ALONG TO A DESTROYER MOORED NEARBY...
SO YOU THINK THEY'LL PUT US ON THE MERSAH RUN NOW?
YES, IT'S THE NEAREST SUPPLY POINT AND YOU'LL PROBABLY TAKE OVER FROM US. WE'RE GOING TO SEA IN A COUPLE OF HOURS...TAKING A BRIGADIER INTO ALEX FOR A CONFERENCE. IT'S TOP-LEVEL STUFF.
SUDDENLY, A MUFFLED EXPLOSION ROCKED THE DESTROYER AT ITS MOORINGS AND AN ANCHORED SHIP CLOSE BY HEAVED VIOLENTLY IN A CONVULSION OF WATER.
GOOD GRIEF! THAT PACKET'S GONE UP!
WHAT WAS IT? IT COULDN'T BE A MINE, SURELY!

THE ITALIAN RAIDERS' SABOTAGE HAD BORNE FRUIT... THE STRICKEN SHIP NEAR THE ENTRANCE SLOWLY SUBSIDED UNDER WATER...
THE HARBOUR ENTRANCE WAS EFFECTIVELY BLOCKED.

IMMEDIATELY A SIGNAL WAS FLASHED TO ALL SHIPS FROM THE BASE ASHORE.
IT SAYS WE'RE TO DRAW BOTTOM LINES IMMEDIATELY, SIR.
THEY MUST THINK LIMPET MINES HAVE BEEN FIXED TO THE HULLS. THAT MEANS ITALIAN FROGMEN HAVE GOT INTO THE HARBOUR.

THE CREW TOOK THE INSTRUCTION WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM. IT WOULD TAKE AN HOUR TO DRAW A LINE ALONG THE SHIP'S BOTTOM.
WHY NOT LET ME DIVE DOWN THERE TO LOOK, SIR? ALL I'D NEED WOULD BE A GOOD TORCH.
I SUPPOSE YOU COULD, O'BRIEN. SEEING WE ONLY DRAW SEVEN FEET.

RUSTY LOST NO TIME IN STRIPPING DOWN TO SWIMMING TRUNKS AND GOING OVER THE SIDE. IN FIFTEEN MINUTES HE MADE HIS REPORT.
ALL CLEAR, SIR. NOT A BLOOMING THING EXCEPT BARNACLES
WELL DONE O'BRIEN. GET YOURSELF IN BOARD... AND THEN YOU CAN TURN IN.

SMALL VESSELS WERE BEGINNING TO FUSS AROUND THE WRECK BLOCKING THE HARBOUR ENTRANCE AND INSTEAD OF GETTING INTO THEIR HAMMOCKS L.C.M.'S CREW PEERED ACROSS THE HARBOUR CURIOUSLY....
IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED AT A WORSE TIME. A DESTROYER IS DUE OUT FOR ALEX TONIGHT.
JERRY AIRCRAFT!
HMS

TWO ENEMY BOMBERS BEGAN TO CIRCLE THE HARBOUR AND BLACK PUFFS OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE DOTTED THE SKY. RUSTY WAS ALREADY RACING TOWARDS HIS GUN POSITION AS THE SALVAGE OFFICER SLOWED HIS LAUNCH NEAR THE LANDING CRAFT...

IT'LL TAKE DAYS TO CLEAR WITH THE EQUIPMENT WE'VE GOT. IF YOU GET ANY BRIGHT IDEAS, LET ME KNOW. THERE'LL BE HECK TO PAY IF THE DESTROYER MISSES THE TIDE TONIGHT!

JIM TURNED TO THE VETERAN PETTY OFFICER, TOM HARRIS...

DO YOU THINK *WE'RE* HEAVY ENOUGH TO PUSH THE OBSTRUCTION OUT OF THE WAY, COX'N?

IT MIGHT BE WORTH A TRY, SIR!

RIGHT! *LET'S GET CRACKING!*

ALL THOUGHT OF SLEEP WAS BRUSHED ASIDE. HERE WAS A CHANCE FOR L.C.X.1 TO DO SOMETHING REALLY WORTH WHILE OFF HER OWN BAT. JIM IMMEDIATELY SIGNALLED HIS INTENTIONS AND MOVED UP HARBOUR...
SLOW AHEAD!
LCX1

AT FIRST JIM TRIED A CAUTIOUS PUSH AT SLOW SPEED. THE SOUND OF GRINDING METAL CAME UP FROM THE SUBMERGED BOW, BUT THE WRECK DID NOT MOVE.
SHE'S CREAKING, SIR, BUT SHE HASN'T BUDGED!
MM! LET'S TRY AGAIN...
LCX1
HERE THEY COME... LOOKS LIKE A BOMB RUN!

BUT THE MOVEMENT WAS ALMOST NEGLIGIBLE. MANY ANXIOUS EYES WERE WATCHING THE LANDING CRAFT'S EFFORTS DESPITE THE ENEMY AIR ATTACK. THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE DESTROYER WAS PROBABLY MORE CONCERNED THAN ANYONE ELSE.
THE LANDING CRAFT'S DRAWING AWAY ASTERN, SIR.
SEND A SIGNAL TELLING THEM NOT TO FOUL IT UP ANY WORSE THAN IT IS, NUMBER ONE.
BUT ALREADY L.C.Y.1 WAS MOVING FORWARD AGAIN — GATHERING SPEED AND IMPETUS WITH EVERY FOOT.
FULL AHEAD! HOLD TIGHT, LADS!

SHE TORE INTO THE OBSTRUCTION AT FULL SPEED WITH EVERYONE HANGING ON GRIMLY.
SHE'S GOING, SIR...
GOT HIM!

AND THE LANDING CRAFT'S MIGHTY EFFORT DID IT. THE SUNKEN SUPERSTRUCTURE ROLLED SLOWLY OVER TO PORT AND DROPPED TO THE SEABED IN DEEP WATER.
THERE MUST BE A TWENTY-FOOT CLEARANCE AT LEAST!
THE OTHER JERRY'S CLEARING OFF!
LCX1

THE WHOLE INCIDENT HAD ONLY TAKEN TEN VIOLENT MINUTES AND FOR A MOMENT EVERYONE WAS ABLE TO RELAX. BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT... LOFTY WAS THE FIRST TO NOTICE THE DAMAGE TO THE BOWS...
HMS
WE'RE HOLED IN THE BOWS, SIR. WATER'S COMING IN FAST!

A QUICK INSPECTION TOLD JIM THAT L.C.X.1 WAS DOOMED.
I'M AFRAID WE'RE SINKING BY THE BOW, SIR.
NEVER MIND ABOUT THAT NOW! LET'S GET YOUR CREW OFF.

L.C.X.1'S SMALL CREW, BUNCHED IN THE STERN OF THE BOAT STARED SADLY AT THEIR SINKING CRAFT...
SHE'S ALMOST GONE, LADS!
AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, I'M SORRY TO SEE HER GO.

WHEN THE BOAT ARRIVED AT THE DESTROYER, ALL WAS BUSTLE. THE SURVIVORS' SADNESS WAS SWAMPED IN A FRESH OUTBURST OF CONGRATULATION.
MANY THANKS... YOUR VESSEL WAS SACRIFICED TO FURTHER A MOST IMPORTANT MISSION. I SHAN'T FAIL TO INFORM THE C-IN-C, MEDITERRANEAN...
567

L.C.X.1'S SURVIVORS SAILED WITH THE DESTROYER TO ALEXANDRIA. AFTER A WONDERFUL HOT MEAL AND A LONG NIGHT'S REST THEY MET ON DECK...
HMS
I'VE JUST HEARD HOW THE FROGMEN SLIPPED INTO TOBRUK HARBOUR, LADS. YOU'LL NEVER GUESS.
I'LL BET I CAN, THOUGH, SIR. THEY SLIPPED THROUGH THE BOOM WHEN WE DID! LOFTY WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE SUB FOLLOWING US AND THE JINX WAS WITH US ALMOST TO THE END!

WHILE L.C.X. I'S CREW WERE TAKING THEIR SURVIVORS' LEAVE IN ENGLAND, TOBRUK WAS RELIEVED BY BRITISH ARMOUR FROM EGYPT. THEN CAME A DAY WHEN THEY ALL MET AGAIN ON A JETTY IN A NORTHERN DOCKYARD TO COMMISSION A FINE NEW LANDING CRAFT.

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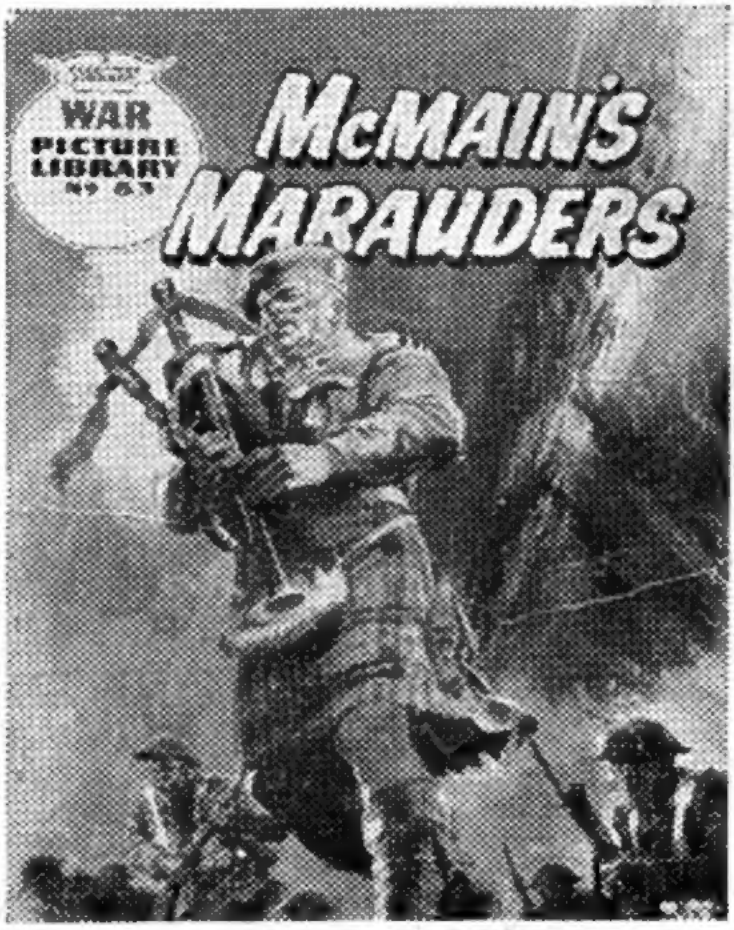

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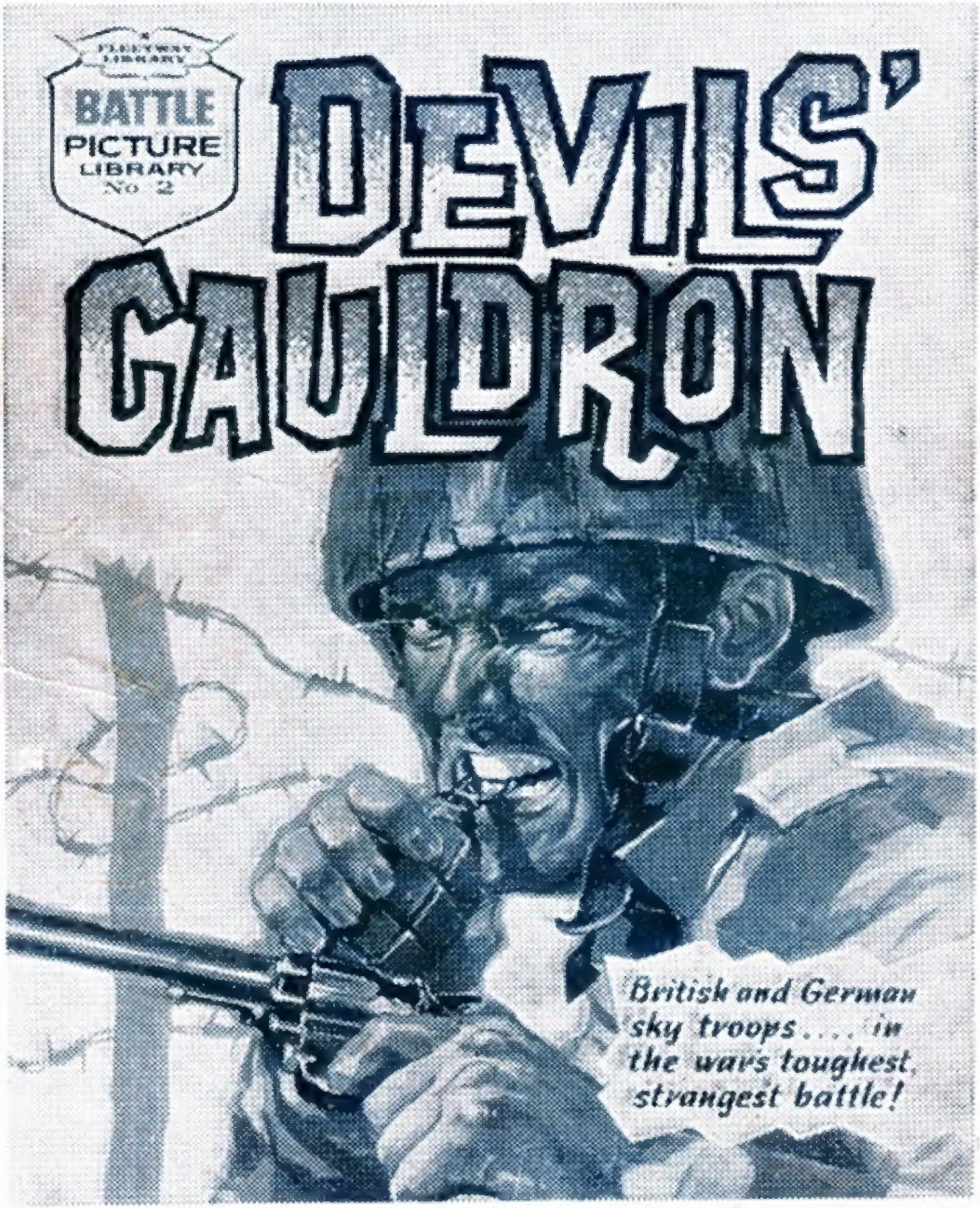
NEW! On Sale Monday, 16th. January.

BATTLE PICTURE LIBRARY



TWO Dramatic Issues Every Month!